

By MICHAEL ARLEN

LILY CHRISTINE

YOUNG MEN IN LOVE

MAY FAIR

THE GREEN HAT

THESE CHARMING PEOPLE

“PIRACY”

THE LONDON VENTURE

THE ROMANTIC LADY

LILY CHRISTINE

by

MICHAEL ARLEN

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*None of the characters in this book are portraits
of living people.*

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TO ATALANTA



CHAPTER I

N the tranquil and sympathetic mingling of their memories, that Saturday night became something unique and very charming.

It was a memory to linger with, and linger they did, for what in the world came easier to them? They had a way of looking back on somebody, maybe some casual acquaintance who had long since forgotten them, with a kind of contemplative affection which must have bored their guardian angels tremendously. For it is notorious that, if there is one thing that bores a guardian angel more than another, it is slackness in his patient, and that is why there is no peace in this world.

But our friends were hardened against the ambitious wiles of sirens, male and female, sacred and profane, and particularly on this occasion, when they had such a fine excuse for their nonsense. For weren't they on their holidays, and what is a holiday if it is not a festival, and what is a festival without a presiding goddess?

So the memory of the toffee-coloured lady presided over their holidays, a deity misty, appealing, and rather sad. And, of course, lonely, for she was a very correct goddess, in line with the best traditions, and what was so particularly nice about her was that one could disbelieve in her attractively, as one can in the dear stately gods and goddesses of the wise old times, instead of being roused to rage and rudeness by one's disbelief, as so often happens in connection with the more serious deities.

And so, with fancy and nonsense, they fêted the memory of Lily Christine during their holiday-time.

In the beginning it was his story, of course, not hers at all. But how wearisome those possessive words are, and anyhow Muriel was not one to stand any nonsense of that kind. That is not to say she was an interfering kind of woman. On the contrary share and share alike was what she said, but when it came to the point she had a way of sharing a thing without dividing it into two parts which always amazed him, as well it might. And another thing. This remarkable woman's way of sharing was to add to the common lot, and to add something delightful and unexpected.

One can imagine how surprising it would be in the business world if partners, when it came to sharing the profits, were suddenly to bring out hidden stores from Heaven knows where. There would be the devil to pay, and quite rightly, for the business world would want to know how the hidden stores had been come by. Whereas in marriage, how thankful either partner is that there are any, what a comfort it is to come, all by chance and surprise, on something delicious.

Well, such thoughts are pleasant to pass the time with, and it is always agreeable to have nice things to say about people, but the thing to be done first of all is to tell of the coming of Lily Christine.

Unfortunately, she emerges first from Harvey's memory, which is unsatisfactory, for Harvey's was a most unsatisfactory kind of memory. What he did was to use his memory to forget with, and then to remember trifles and trivialities with a part of him which was so elusive that not even his wife ever came near to laying her hands on it. She called it other names besides elusive. But he maintained that what he did remember, he remembered attractively. That was the main thing, he said. He was partial, and why not?

Not to beat about the bush, one is frequently forced

into the position of having to disbelieve Mr. Harvey. And then one is forced to admit that nothing in the world could shake his lack of evidence about almost anything that happened to him.

The point was, that Mrs. Harvey was away for the night when Lily Christine happened. But that was not what bothered her. Such things did not bother her in the least. She was, as it were, drenched with her husband's matchless unsuitability to be anyone's lover but her own. And she was quite right.

No, what bothered her was that he had taken advantage of her absence in London for the night to sleep "out." Now she had forbidden that time and again, as who, in her place, would not? He was a lean delicate man, was Harvey, given to every variety of trouble in the way of colds. But he was easily influenced, particularly by hearty, sinewy men. Every now and then he would be fired with the ambition to be hard, to be as iron. Stealthily, he would feel his muscles. He would eat less meat, or he would eat more meat. After meeting someone who boasted of doing physical exercises every morning he would brood for days and finally strain every muscle in his body by trying them with incredible energy. Swimming he tried too, and almost caught his death of cold. Also, patent medicines of all kinds were as magnets to him, but he never dared to use them.

A few days after they had taken this furnished house in the country for the summer, they had met a neighbouring gentleman, weighing not less than seventeen stone, who had casually mentioned that he slept in the open every night, wet or fine, and never had had a day's illness in his life. Harvey brooded on that. It preyed on him. What he wanted was to be hard, to be as iron, never to have a day's illness in his life. But Muriel would not have it, saying nastily that the snag was that if he slept

out he would not have a day's illness but a week's or a month's.

That was what she had said, and now, when she came back from her night away, he met her with a sheepish grin. She knew at once what that meant. And although he swore he had not caught a cold she fancied she heard something that might have been a sniff, and she was so angry that she did not say anything.

So there was something of a strain between them when he came to tell of the great adventure of Lily Christine. He revenged himself on her with the story of Lily Christine. He did not tell it to her, but threw out insinuations.

“Rupert, what are you talking about?” she cried at last.

But he pulled at his moustache, with a mysterious, musing air.

Now, although Mr. Harvey's is the only moustache in this book, it does not merit detailed description. It was a brownish affair, looking its best in a dim light, when it might have been taken as belonging to a military gentleman. That, to be fair, was not doing it too much honour, for it once had belonged to a military gentleman. But a veil over that moustache.

His wife had to be pretty sharp with him more than once before he could be prevailed upon to stop pulling at it and come out into the open. But even then he would only tell his story in bits and pieces. He chose pregnant, cardinal, unsatisfying words.

“Youth, beauty, simplicity!” he mused.

“Yes, but who *was* she?”

“A lady of fashion, my love. But a very unusual one.”

“Dear me, what do you know about ladies of fashion!”

"Really, Muriel! One goes by instinct. I tell you, she was a rare bird."

"Yes, but what was her *name*?"

But, with unnatural and odious familiarity, he would refer to her only as Lily Christine.

"And you so punctilious," she complained, "about not calling acquaintances by their Christian names!"

"But I'm trying to tell you, Muriel, that I got to know her well. Very well."

And he pulled at his moustache, with a mysterious, musing air. She could have hit him. Maybe she would have hit him if he had not given way and come out with her name.

"Oh, that one!" she cried, pleasantly thrilled. For Muriel was not one of those who despise the social scene because they are not of it. She kept an open mind about it. There just might be some good in such people.

"She must be pretty," she said. "I've seen photographs."

"They couldn't do her justice, I'm sure. I was struck all of a heap."

"Rupert, now do talk sense and stop teasing! I'm sure you were bored to death with her. What was she like, really? Full of tricks?"

"Tricks? What cats women, even the nicest women, were. 'Tricks!'

"No," he said. "Certainly not."

"Oh, Rupert, of course she was! Do tell me, dear. I have to write to your mother to-morrow and I'll tell her all about it, it will amuse the old girl."

"'Tricks!'" he fumed. "Lily Christine!"

"Yes, what all those people have—languors—rudenesses—casualnesses—little tiresome things—showing bits of leg above knee—cocktails—fashionable blanknesses."

And each recalled the few they had met, the pale, blank, staring, eyelid-less society faces, the long slim, slack limbs carelessly attached to blank, eyelid-less, blue, transparent eyes that looked as though they had been dazzled in the dawn of history and so never quite took in commonplace people to whom they had just been introduced.

"Oh, if that's what you mean!" said Harvey. "You wrong her, Muriel. Quite half of her was human."

"And the other?"

"Divine, lovey!" he chuckled.

But she would not be put out, and he went on quite seriously:

"Honestly, Muriel, I never wanted to smack her once. Tucked her legs up under her like a schoolgirl and sat quiet."

"Well, I never heard of such a thing! Schoolgirl! Why, the woman has two children!"

It surprised him that she knew that.

Why, all the world knew that! Those people spent their time being photographed with their dogs and horses and children. "Mrs. Summerest at North Berwick with her children, Julia and Timothy." "Mrs. Summerest, wife of the famous Test Match player, with her favourite horse, Catsmeat."

"She hasn't got a horse," he said patiently. "She is too poor."

"Brrr! And I suppose you went out to the White Lion to get her gin and try to make her cocktails. How ridiculous!"

But he would not give in to her. The question of cocktails had not arisen. The young lady had asked for water.

"Then she was playing some deep game," Muriel said darkly. "I know that sort. It's well known that they drink alcohol in large quantities twice a day before meals. But I hope the poor thing had a good dinner?"

The dinner had consisted, he said, mostly of potatoes—as usual. For Muriel, like many people inclined to stoutness, was very partial to potatoes, particularly potatoes in their jackets.

But even they had served their purpose, apparently. Destiny does not overlook potatoes. Attraction conquers them. Romance exalts them. And it was, Muriel could gather, while the lovely creature was poised above her second potato that he, reluctantly but inevitably contrasting her with his comfortable wife, had decided that the time had at last come for him to abandon home, family, and honour for romance.

"In other words," she commented, "you offered the poor thing a good man's love."

He let that pass, concealing as best he could the irritation natural in one who has been unfairly reminded that he has a kind face.

"And I suppose," Muriel giggled, "the poor thing accepted your kind offer out of politeness."

It was maddening of her to keep on referring to Lily Christine as the "poor thing." . . .

So Harvey rose and did his damndest, by amplifying and adorning the adventure of Lily Christine, to make it seem debonair and dangerous. He began almost to believe that he *had* been a devil of a fellow, that the moment he had set eyes on her something had snapped in him and something else in him had bloomed intoxicatingly. Those sunburnt arms . . .

"What about them?" said Muriel.

"Nothing," he said gloomily. "I was just thinking aloud . . ."

And then she gave way, and laughed and laughed.

It goes without saying that the Harveys were quite incapable of dramatizing one another. But it was fun to try now and then, and it was fun to emerge from the

attempt with a deep, delightful certainty of the other's ridiculous unsuitability in any given situation of the thrilling sort.

But his, after all, was only one side of the story. What of Lily Christine, if she might make so bold? A wife's place was to suffer. Let him spare her nothing.

She was prepared to admit--since he insisted--the truth of his harrowing confession, which was, in a word, that he had no sooner set eyes on the gleaming sunburnt arms of the lovely stranger in the stranded motor-car--the old, old story of the new world!--than he had given himself up to illegitimate dreams, had approached, paid homage--and put the poor thing up for the night in his wife's bed.

But what had she, the racy young beauty, the darling of the photographers, what had she done about it? How had she reconciled the honourable state of motherhood with such casual goings-on? The mother of Julia and Timothy she might be publicly, but what of her privately? Was she nymph or matron?

"Matron," he said. "Decidedly. But decently veiled. Charming outside."

Very well, but how had the famous and exquisite Mrs. Summerest, wife of that dashing cricketer and *beau*, Ivor Summerest, how had she met the offensive advances of a commonplace-looking Englishman of indeterminate age? It went without saying that she had lured him on. It was well known that such young ladies always lured men on, even quite unattractive men. But how had she lured him on? She asked for his mother's sake, the better to amuse the old girl with her letter on the morrow.

"But she did nothing of the kind, Muriel! We have been misled about society folk. Perhaps among themselves they indulge in those short, sharp love affairs which

we read of in novels—but with an outsider, no. Why, even when I went into her bedroom—”

Alas, he had not the romaneer's full courage. He faltered, floundered, fell.

“ You don't believe me ? ” he murmured, pulling at that moustache.

“ Don Juan ! ” said she, and in just such a tone might Don Juan have miscalled Don Quixote.

“ Nothing can be gained by calling me names, my love.”

“ You went into her bedroom ! You have the face to sit there and ask me to believe that you furtively opened the door of a complete stranger's room and stole in—looking hopeful ! You ! My goodness ! ”

Bludgconed though he was, inspiration came to him. Inspiration, in the ever-surprising cloths of memory, descended upon him.

“ I have a witness, anyhow,” he said. “ Two, in fact.”

And her surprise, though gratifying, made him slightly uncomfortable.

“ Rupert, the maids ! They saw you in her room ! ”

“ My dear, don't be so earnest ! And if they had seen me in her room, what of it ? But they saw me leaving it—at least, I think they did, for I only saw them scuttling upstairs. I suppose they had taken advantage of your being away to go out together.”

But she was upset, her round grey eyes quite distressed. He dwindled immensely.

“ Really, Muriel, you are too absurd ! ” he tried to laugh.

“ It's no good palming me off with common-sense noises, Rupert, when you know you have been indiscreet.”

That side of the question simply had not occurred to him before. That the two country girls, Edith and

Jenny, could for a moment have thought he was "up" to anything—it was absurd.

He began to laugh, without constraint. It seemed to him just funny that anyone could possibly put any misconstruction on his being in the pretty lady's room for a few minutes. Well, it was a funny world. She had called out, just as he was about to unknot his tie, to ask him if he could let her have a cigarette.

"Really, darling, don't exaggerate," he begged her. "Surely you don't seriously imagine that----"

"Oh, don't talk to me, Rupert! This kind of thing upsets me, you know it does. And it's of your Lily Christine I'm thinking—this is the way stories get around about people like her. And in our house. She's recognizable—and the sort that some people somehow *want* to make up dirty stories about."

And, as usual, he was quite helpless before any manifestation of her quality.

In the ten years of their married life he had never ceased to give thanks for his good fortune in having married a woman whom he did not have to lead. He could not lead—not, that is, with any pleasure or satisfaction to himself, whatever others might say. On the rare occasions when he had been thrust into the position of having to lead, he had found people extraordinarily nice and flattering about his capacities. But that had never deluded him into taking a favourable view of himself. He knew himself too well. Harvey was one of those men who have a furtive underhand alliance with themselves against the good sense of anyone who thinks highly of them.

With his wife, he had long since resigned himself to being unable to forestall her, even by the most conscious effort, on her natural plane of indignant, efficient fineness.

But that was not what Muriel thought. She was roused to fury by the very idea. She fought for him against himself. She was as a sentinel over him, ever watchful lest he should fail himself in his own estimation. But he inevitably did, for such was his nature. It is impossible to guard a fortress that is betrayed from within. Never could she prevent the enemies of his self-confidence from attacking him. All she could do was to fight them on ground favourable to themselves.

None the less, she never relaxed her care over him through the myriad silent ordeals of his self-criticism and lack of confidence. And it was her dearest hope that when he was old and doddering he would be the most selfish, egotistical, conceited, and intolerable old beast since Sindbad's playmate—thus to be revenged on himself for so many years of blindness to his own perfections.

It goes without saying that the legend of Lily Christine easily survived the shabby blow dealt to it by Edith and Jenny.

They had brought their own cook, Mrs. Peanall, with them from Kensington, but Edith and Jenny had come to them with the house. The Harveys always took a "furnished" house for a couple of months every summer, but not too far from London, in case Harvey, who always spent one whole month down there, should be suddenly called up to London for some important discussion on the editorial staff of the *Daily*—. Although his chief, Lord Townleigh, usually settled all such questions for himself from his yacht.

As for the children's nurse, Muriel always gave her her holidays in August and herself managed John and James, which was her idea of a perfect holiday. So the lower orders in the house comprised only the veteran Mrs. Peanall and the Edith-Jenny combination. Muriel very carefully sounded Mrs. Peanall as to any kitchen gossip

that might have issued from Edith and Jenny on the occasion of the strange lady's appearance for dinner and the night. Mrs. Peanall was inclined to be captious, saying she ought to have been warned that someone was coming to dinner as there had been nothing but cold meat and potatoes and an apple tart. Mrs. Peanall was a taciturn, trustworthy woman, who had been Muriel's aunt's cook in Dulwich. She said that Edith the parlour-maid was not given to talking much, while little Jenny was her devoted slave. Edith the parlour-maid was a pretty sharp-faced thing, but there was no harm in her. Mrs Peanall had seen no harm in letting them both go out, after they had served the dinner, to a birthday party in the village. And maybe they had come home a little late, but they were good, quiet girls.

Muriel drew a breath of relief. No doubt the Edith-Jenny combination on its way upstairs had been much too scared at the possible consequences of being out so late to notice anything at all.

All the same, the obliteration of Edith and Jenny from the discussions of their betters did not have that soothing effect on his wife for which Harvey had hoped. Jealous she was not, but she took a decided interest in what went on in her bedroom during her absence. And the fact that he had by now a distinct cold in the head did him no good, either.

Girls, Muriel's point was, well-brought-up girls and young ladies, did not immediately follow casual meetings with strangers by asking them into their bedrooms.

His wife, he murmured, was doubtless used to him and could not gauge the deep impression he might make on suddenly presenting himself before a young lady of fastidious taste. "Besides," he pointed out, the journalist, "besides, one takes a pride in being able to see things from every point of view. . . ."

But Muriel refused to take any pride whatsoever in being able to see this particular thing from any but the proper point of view. If there was one thing she detested, it was immodesty. She tried to imagine herself in Lily Christine's place. Imagined thus, the occasion wore a air of positive indecency.

"Yes, indecency," said Muriel. "She may be all you say—nice, good as gold—I'm not saying anything. But could *I* have a strange man into my bedroom? My goodness!"

"One should try to understand," he spaciously said, "before condemning. One should—"

"Do stop saying one this and one that! The point is, have these bright and—so you say—attractive young women no fear of the—well, the possible consequences of such immodesty?"

"I don't quite follow you, my love."

"Aren't they afraid that a man might take advantage of such encouragement to propel himself into a position of disgusting intimacy?"

"You've got a nasty suspicious mind, Muriel."

"I've got a perfectly ordinary mind and I don't go about asking casual acquaintances into my bedroom."

"It has been said, dear, that beautiful women are less susceptible to the fear of—of misconduct than their plainer sisters—"

"Cant!"

"Their plainer sisters, dear, who usually appear to be obsessed by the possibly evil designs of men. Besides, she only wanted a cigarette."

"Well, after this I shall imagine a country-house weekend of these people as being largely spent by everyone in sneaking in and out of bedrooms where they have no business. A cigarette! Rupert, was she actually in bed?"

" What you don't understand is that these people have different ideas from ours. Rather nicer ones sometimes, I fancy, for instance, they don't see any harm where we see . . . immodesty."

" Yes," she said, and seemed lost in thought.

" Yes," she said thoughtfully, " but there's a frightening sort of casualness—somehow—about all that."

" Frightening? I don't think so at all. There's something very nice and human about it."

" I suppose so—yes. All the same . . ."

" You're exaggerating, Muriel."

" I'm sure they must get themselves into awful messes sometimes . . . when they don't intend to. There *must* be a sort of punishment for casualness, Rupert—or else everything people like me are brought up to believe is just so much nonsense."

" Casualness? " he said. " It's the popular word nowadays—but is it quite the right one? How would it do to try 'innocence' instead? "

" Did this Lily Christine strike you as . . . innocent? "

" Don't you see, Muriel—that was the amazing thing about her! "

Her sudden laugh was streaked with irritation.

" You have a funny idea of innocence, I must say! And there she was in bed—in my bed! "

" Yes—and in your nightdress, too," he laughed. " Saying that she was allowed only five cigarettes a day and as she had smoked only ten so far might she have just one more to make it an odd number. And blushing."

" I should hope so! And I suppose you thought her lovely."

Well, what he had thought particularly lovely about her was a quality of sunburn she had worn, dark yet golden, tropical yet radiant. Fascinating, that was. One had somehow always thought of that kind of beauty—

frail, timid beauty—as being kept sheltered, protected from rude elements. One had understood that such complexions were preserved in cosmetics, creams, milk, the Lord knows what. How delightful to find that, on the contrary, a woman so lovely would risk her—

“ You are only showing your ignorance, Rupert. It’s a new fashion.”

“ Oh come, dear ! The sun’s a new fashion ? ”
“ Treating it like a masseur and beauty parlour is. Those people spend weeks and months sitting about on foreign beaches in pyjamas and cocoa-nut oil making a business of getting sunburnt. I’d sunburn them, the slackers. It’s enough to make one a Bolshevik.”

But he could not see eye to eye with her there. Exactly where she had acquired her fascinating sunburn he could not, of course, tell. But he was inclined to think she had acquired it in a contemplative, solitary way.

“ Yes, you can see them being contemplative and solitary any week you like in the *Sketch* and *Tatler*. ”

All the same, he saw Lily Christine with the wind in her hair, the sun in her eyes, alone. He liked to think of her as being alone. Being alone suited her. Of course, she could not be expected to be alone all the time, but that was how he liked to see her.

“ You haven’t said anything about her hair, Rupert.”

“ What would you like me to say about it, dear ? ”

“ Idiot ! Was it cut very short ? ”

But he had only a general impression of the young lady’s hair. His general impression, however, was very favourable. Such hair, he felt sure, was far from common. It was curly dark brown stuff, very curly, and from time to time there were all sorts of bright lights in it. He had enjoyed watching it very much.

“ You stood there, I gather, taking an inventory of the poor thing ! I wonder what on earth she thought of *you*. ”

“ Poor child, she couldn’t see me ! ”

“ Rupert, couldn’t see you ! What *do* you mean ? ”

As usual, he had kept something back important. Tiresome was not the word for him when he wanted to be tiresome. But she found the word.

“ You’re revolting ! ” she said, almost in tears.

And so he had to be a good boy and begin right from the beginning.

CHAPTER II

THE house the Harveys had taken that summer was about fifteen miles from Southampton. A winding lane, about a mile long, led to it from the main London road.

Harvey was lounging home to dinner after a rambling walk. The evening was still and fragrant, the smoke of his pipe hung in the air. A man of tranquil pleasures, he was happy with that quiet intensity that only comes when one is alone and makes one wonder what is the use of love.

None the less, he thought it a pity Muriel had had to go up to London for the night to see her mother. And it was then that he finally decided to sleep out that night on the little verandah-affair outside his bedroom. He could easily manage a shake-down there. He wouldn't even tell the servants, so that they couldn't split on him. Where was that camel's-hair rug? That would be just the thing.

Musing thus, he found that Florence had disappeared. Well, that was her lookout. She was daft, that girl—full of unnecessary energy. Florence was a Sealyham maiden, and from the day of her birth she had been busy pointing out that tranquil pleasures could be overrated. She must have gone on home, forgetful that maidens should not wander alone. No doubt her impatience would be her ruin one day. Well, the woman always pays.

And then Lily Christine happened.

“There,” said Harvey, “there before my eyes was a maiden enwrapped, enclosed, enveloped, and enchanted

by patience. Unlike Florence, she would come to no harm. But I'd much rather have had to face a thousand Florences."

Thus the debonair and dangerous Harvey of the legend, who had no sooner seen a pretty girl in a stationary car in a lonely lane than he had rakishly approached her, gives way to the shy, awkward man who had been startled, on rounding a corner of the quiet lane which he had come to look on as almost his own, to see a dusky, crouching, wolfish car.

Harvey was a motorist of the Morris-Oxford sort, but he knew his betters when he saw them. And he was overawed by that low, threatening bonnet. It had a wicked look, a wolfish *chic*. He thought it must be a racing car. It had a nose to cut the wind, a nose to send the wind about its silly business. There was no nonsense about it at all. It menaced. And on its shining brow were carved a pair of silver wings, but they were not angels' wings.

"Might is right," that car said. "Get to hell out of here," it said, even while stationary. He was relieved that, in the narrow lane, it was stationary.

But to have appeared there, it must have moved there. He gave an anxious thought to Florence. Had worse than loss of reputation happened to the silly girl? A quiet, narrow lane was no place for such a car. Presently he was to learn that the menace was known as a 3-litre Hawk-Ellis, whatever that meant. Hawk-Ellises he had seen, admired, and passed by, but a 3-litre Hawk-Ellis struck him as one of those exaggerations which plain men should not encourage too near home.

The Hawk-Ellis belonged to that new aristocracy headed by Bentley, which with unheard-of insolence was contending with the majesty of Rolls-Royce in price while trying to wrest the coronet of grace from Hispano and braving the dowager-like contempt of the Daimler

for social recognition. And, as though that were not enough for any car built by man, this new aggressive aristocracy never ceased appealing to the aspiring dreams of youth with a certain pitiless elegance of line, a suave but deadly slenderness, and the fatal glamour of speed. People who knew them well said that at the bottom these cars had good hearts. Harvey had always rather doubted that, as poor men always do rather doubt such statements. As for this car that wolfishly held the lane, he was positive that it had neither heart nor soul. It was a trafficker in speed, that was what it was.

And it was in irresponsible hands. That was undeniable. Hatless, sleeveless, expressionless, brown as a nigger, sat a girl at the steering-wheel. She may have been a young lady, but she looked like a girl. If she was a young lady why wasn't she wearing a hat instead of flaunting her curly hair all over the place? In fact, there was something sinister about the whole bag of tricks.

There they sat, still, brooding, patient, dusky girl and dusky car. And he had to pass by, to get home. He had to squeeze by, the lane was so narrow.

He prepared to squeeze by, taking his pipe out of his mouth. He wondered what the upper classes were doing so near his house. She did not look as though she had a puncture. She looked as though everyone else had a puncture and she was waiting until they had finished fussing.

He wanted to squeeze by quickly, without looking at her. Her immobility embarrassed him intensely. He felt he was intruding on her tranquillity. She was smoking. Although he kept his eyes averted, he distinctly got the impression that smoking must be bad for her, she seemed to be enjoying it so. Nothing else appeared to matter to her. Certainly the fact that in the silence of the evening another human being was trying to squeeze

by her confounded car in a narrow lane did not appear to matter to her.

He could feel that she was staring right at him, at his profile. His profile began to bother him intensely. So he stuck his pipe into his mouth again and gave her a look. The manners of these young people nowadays! The young lady appeared to be looking right through him.

Then he got the amazing impression that she was peering at him. Well! He was only a couple of yards away at most. Peering at him. Well! He broke into a sweat. Her eyes widened, brightened—immensely. They were far too bright and far too blue. Mermaid's eyes. Bad, bad.

And suddenly she raised a brown arm and waved something at him. That was going too far.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered.

"Broken," she said.

She was flushing vividly under her sunburn.

"Broken?" he said, looking at the car.

He was glad she was flushing.

"Smashed," she said, with a nervous laugh.

She was showing him a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles. Broken. Smashed.

"Oh!" he said. "I thought you meant your car."

He wanted to wipe his forehead with a handkerchief. But he had come out without a handkerchief.

"It's not my car, which makes things worse—apart from what might happen to anyone who got in the way." And she laughed with a nervousness that suited him down to the ground. She wasn't one of the hardened ones, anyhow. He began to pick himself up.

"You mean, you can't see?" he said, astonished. Those eyes, so bright, so blue. Mermaid's eyes. But short-sighted. Well, it was a funny world.

She had forgotten her driving licence at home. And she

had seen a nasty dark blur that might be a policeman. In the ordinary way she would have gone toward the dark blur and asked him to help her, as she had stupidly broken her spectacles and she couldn't really see to drive without them. But what she had done was to give way to panic, to stumble out of the main road, to wind in and out of lanes and by-paths. . . .

"For hours," she said.

Lost, crawling, blind. . . .

"*Couldn't* feel more helpless!" she said.

Her eyes, now they were certain he was actually there, peered no longer. They were looking at him through her shyness with a sort of comic confused trustfulness in his sympathy.

He had an urgent desire to do something for her. She obviously thought he could. She didn't know him, poor girl.

"I don't know what to suggest," he said—and felt like a man behind a counter in a shop.

She laughed, not at him but at her own discomfiture. She was so gentle in her confusion, not aloof, not hard. How had she of all girls come by such a devil of a car?

"It *is* hard," she said. "Probably never have the chance of driving such a nice car again."

He couldn't help remarking that it struck him as a significant car rather than a nice car. It was then that he heard it was a 3-litre Hawk-Ellis, whatever that meant.

"You don't think," she suddenly began, and hesitated, confused. "You don't think I might find someone round here to drive me to . . ."

He looked thoughtful. He was rather good at that.

"A station would do," she said.

"The nearest is Sopleigh, and I don't suppose there's a train to anywhere from there at this time of night. I've never seen a train stop there yet even in the daytime."

He thought. He thought helpfully.

"There's Southampton, of course," he said. "Fifteen miles."

"Yes, I've just come from there."

He had an idea. It excited him.

"Look here, I can't offer to drive you because ----"

"But I wouldn't dream . . . !"

Her confusion had the pleasant effect of, as it were, de-confusing him.

"Because," he said, "I simply couldn't trust myself to drive a car like that. I've always been used to little things——"

"You should see mine in London - a vintage Buick."

Ah! Good girl.

"But I'll tell you what I *can* do easily. I can sit beside you and be your eyes to Southampton."

She stammered, painfully. She refused, definitely.

"You'd have to have dinner first," he said, "anyhow."

"Dinner?" she said blankly.

"It's a quarter to nine, you see."

"Oh, I feel such a nuisance!" she said bitterly.

Now how had he come by the amazingly practical idea, so unlike him, of dinner? He had simply asked himself what Muriel would have done. What did Muriel always say? "When in doubt, offer food and drink." It was a quarter to nine, and the poor girl was miles from anywhere where she could get a decent meal.

"I'm sorry my wife is away for the night," he said, "but the point is that while you have some dinner I can ring up Southampton and see if we can get a man to drive you into London or back to Southampton to a hotel."

That was how Lily Christine happened. He sat beside her in the crouching beast and directed her as far as the house. She appeared to have confidence in his direction. The car sprang forward with monstrous confidence.

"It's one of those acceleration cars," she said. "Lovely, isn't it?"

"Lovely," he said.

He disapproved strongly of her habit of turning to him when she spoke. She ought to be told about that. It certainly was one of those acceleration cars. Apparently you had to go about sixty miles an hour to get into top. Or was she doing that just for the fun of the thing? Imagine Jane Austin driving a car like this!

"Is it a racing car?" he asked.

"A racing car! Why, this won't do more than about ninety!"

"Oh, I see," he said.

The confounded thing nosed its way round corners like a contemptuous monster and then roared on, was pulled up sharp at the next corner and then leapt on, while her right arm never ceased moving backward and forward in an absent-minded orgy of gear-changing. Queer idea of fun some people had. He was glad when they arrived.

She had driven down from London to lunch with friends on a yacht in Southampton Water. If her friends had stayed at anchor she might have spent the night on board, but they had decided to cross to Deauville. Harvey gathered that the pretty lady did not like Deauville. So she had begun motoring back to London.

Harvey telephoned as soon as they were indoors. Two Southampton garages he knew did not answer at all, and another took five minutes to understand what he wanted and then said all their men were out.

"It really doesn't matter a bit," she said, "whether I get to London to-night or not. There's sure to be an inn somewhere near I can put up at."

Harvey thought of the nasty little inn at Sobleigh.

" Shall I get through to London and tell them you won't be home ? "

" It really doesn't matter. My husband has been playing cricket at Worcester and I don't suppose he will be back until late to-morrow."

And then, of course, her name had come out. Summerrest's wife !

Harvey had not seen Summerrest since his schooldays, as he took no interest in county cricket. Summerrest had been the hero of his schooldays. Not Harvey's own hero, by any means, but certainly the school's idol. Well ! she wasn't at all the sort of woman he would have imagined as Mrs. Summerrest.

As they dined, he couldn't get a silly idea out of his head that Summerrest hadn't played quite fair ; he ought to have married a woman more his own size. There were plenty of them about, God knew. He even went to the trouble of picturing what Summerrest's wife ought to look like. A lean muscular young woman she would be, with handsome features, a taste for dressing in leather, and a sharp way with her of " keeping her eye on the ball." He felt positive that this Mrs. Summerrest would have some difficulty in " keeping her eye on the ball," with or without spectacles.

(He was wrong there for she played a good game of golf and tennis. But Harvey, of course, was doing what we are all apt to when we find a stranger sympathetic ; he was giving her as virtues what he was conscious of possessing as failings.)

He told her he had been Summerrest's fag at school. She glanced at him seriously. He had a queer feeling that she knew he hadn't liked Summerrest.

" I'm his fag now," she said, smiling. " Ivor has always needed a fag or fags. But he is very kind to them, isn't he ? "

"The whole school worshipped him," Harvey said. "Masters as well."

She looked thoughtful. "It's understandable, isn't it? My son Timothy has a quite definite sense that his father is—is—"

"Is a god," said Harvey seriously. Well, he could understand it.

She laughed. "It makes one feel so small," she said, "the marvellous admiration little children have for one."

Harvey, who had not given a thought to Summerest for many years, remembered that he had been afraid of him at school. What a queer sort of fear that had been! He had been afraid of *having* to like him.

The first part of his life at school had been dominated by Summerest. The fellow had had an amazing gift for being liked, there was no denying that. And he took trouble about it, too. He, the great Summerest, the greatest cricketer of his generation, took the trouble to make even a fag like him, with little casual kindnesses and cordialities. But Harvey, the insignificant little swot, had always stuck to his unreasonable aversion.

A trace of it came back to him even now, after all these years, while the man's wife sat at his table absently digging into a potato. He relived through his schooldays while she ate that potato.

Summerest had cast a gloom over his mind during the impressionable years, a gloom he could not define except as being caused by a cloudy suspicion that the world was a funny place if a man like Summerest could be a hero in it. Yet he had never been able to accuse Summerest of anything but that he was too infernally likeable.

Well, the world was a funny place, anyhow. Here were he and the man's wife sitting at dinner as calmly and quietly as you please.

They talked really very little. That was nice, too.

Everything was pleasant that evening. He could not help feeling that while they sat there with scarcely a word, two strangers, there was a lack of constraint between them, a sort of unwinding of understanding. They were in sympathy. He liked her immensely for her atmosphere of trusting him, for seeming to let him in, without at all emphasizing the admission, into a part of her that wasn't public but was peopled by dim unused thoughts. She couldn't, of course, bring out these thoughts—that wasn't to be expected of anyone so shy and reticent. But it was nice of her to let him see that his silence and her silence were good companions.

He was sure she had never in her life said to anyone "What are you thinking?" or "A penny for your thoughts." No matter how well she knew one, she would respect one's silences and reticences. Yes, angels *do* fear to tread, not a doubt of it.

Very soon after dinner she rose to go. And when they both suddenly realized that there was a slight difficulty as to where she was to go, they burst out laughing.

"I'd quite forgotten all that," she said, laughing. "It's been just as though I'd dropped in to have a chat with an old friend."

There really was no possible inn for her nearer than Southampton, he pointed out. So, after all, she would have to let him guide her there, and he could find his way back easily enough.

"Yes," she said, flushing. "Now that I know--like you—I don't feel so badly about being a nuisance."

He liked that. It was true, in a warm personal way. They were standing outside the house, by the car. It was a bright night, with a crescent moon. The car looked very superb and sleek and dangerous.

"John and James," it occurred to Harvey to say, "would go mad about this car. Pity they are asleep."

What little conversation they had had over dinner had been largely about Miss Julia and Master Timothy Summerest and the Masters John and James Harvey. And there, of course, Summerest's name had come in again. The perfect psychology.

"But can you imagine," Harvey left it to his wife.

Muriel, however, could do nothing of the kind. She had not been to a public school, had not been a fag, knew nothing of the perfect psychology.

"It's a psychology," Harvey suggested, "that likes to be popular. I don't say the prefect will sacrifice any qualities in himself for the sake of popularity. He won't. He has pride. He won't sacrifice anything of himself. But he will discipline his juniors and fellows into sacrificing any qualities in *them* which might prevent their liking and admiring him. He is, you see, the right thing to like and admire. They can't do better."

"Ivor," Lily Christine had said of Summcrest, "is a marvellous parent. The children worship him. But it's always rather difficult to keep them in anything like order for a little while after he has gone."

'They stood by the car, in the bright night.

"Thank you for your kindness," she murmured. It's nice to meet a friend."

Then, and before then did it occur to Harvey that there was no reason at all why she should not stay the night in the house, that it was the obvious and sensible thing for her to do.

She considered the suggestion gravely.

"I *am* tired," she murmured.

She stood there, slack, thoughtful, a long-legged shadow. The charming mystery of strangers! There is in all of us a wayward lyric germ, a germ bright and active with the hopes of the God that made man in his own image. And he who does not respect this germ within

him shall surely kill it and be left empty evermore, for this is the germ that bids us linger and ponder and create, that feels the stir of beauty, that respects the future, the unknown, the stranger.

"Your wife," she said. "Are you sure . . ."

His wife, he assured her, were she at home, would long since have made the sensible suggestion.

She consented, but without emphasis, without making anything unusual of it. She had already said: "It's nice to meet a friend." And there it was.

But as they were going back into the house she glanced at him with that quick stabbing shyness and seemed to say: "After all, we ought to get on, oughtn't we, as we are both fags of Summerest's?—even though you don't like him and I do."

And Muriel, listening to him, could see them together, two shy people. She could, as it were, hear that progression by reticences which two such people together would substitute for conversation, the thoughtful care they would lavish on half-finished sentences.

She unhesitatingly and, for all her joking, completely accepted her husband's Lily Christine. She always had complete faith in his uneager fastidiousness as she had too, in his lack of observation. Apparently, for all his fancy decorations, all he had noticed about the famous Mrs. Summerest were her lovely short-sighted eyes, her curly hair, her long legs, and her sunburn. She must have been very pretty, he supposed. He had not noticed her clothes at all. Then he had—by request, of course—strolled into her bedroom as though it was any kind of room, had smoked a cigarette with her, pacing up and down while she lay in bed—and talking to her about the proper education of children.

"There's the wife for a man to have!" he told Muriel. "She does all the bothering about her children, about

their bringing-up and education, and she loves her husband so much—although she must know he hasn't a tenth of her intelligence—that she doesn't in the least mind their preferring the god who plays with them now and then to the mother who has to keep them in order afterwards."

CHAPTER III



IT is difficult to say what Lily Christine expected of marriage when she actually came face to face with it. It is difficult to say what girls getting on for nineteen expect of marriage when they marry for love. No doubt they expect a state of bliss everlasting. No doubt they expect that what is shall be for ever and ever. Certainly there is one thing they do not expect, and that is marriage.

Lily Christine was embarked on the business of getting married at an early age. She had a good heart, that was what it was. Her father understood her, saying that she had had a Viennese great-grandmother, and that, whereas Russian women were good companions and Frenchwomen good housekeepers, Viennese women had good hearts.

However it was, marriage kept on getting in her way at an age when most girls are still looking about them ; she kept on stumbling over marriage whichever way she turned. A gratifying number of young men appeared to be obsessed by the idea that she would make them a good wife. They said there was a gentleness about her, a tenderness, a something that was Unusual in girls nowadays. Anyhow they wanted to marry her.

And so she found herself getting engaged from the moment she "came out." Presently she found herself in a chronic state of secret engagements. She did not know what to do. She thought of various dodges for keeping herself disengaged. She almost gave up dancing, for it was while dancing that she lapsed into that acquiescent state of engagement which she could not afterward account for.

Finally she decided on retiring into a convent. But her mother, who did not take her engagements very seriously, said that a convent was a draughty place for a girl whose lungs were not her strongest point. She advised Lily Christine to talk more. She said that would come to the same thing as retiring to a convent. She said that if Lily Christine would listen less and talk more she might find men less eager to tie her up in bonds of holy matrimony.

But presently Lily Christine found that it was her eyesight that was at the bottom of the trouble. At parties and the like she did not wear spectacles as often as she should, being a silly girl and therefore given over to vanity. But when she did just slip them on she found that a queerly aggressive look came over the eyes of her partner. This queerly aggressive look, she found, was directly due to an uncontrollable access of tenderness.

Her spectacles, instead of repelling, seemed to fascinate young men. Her spectacles made them think of her as a weak little thing, even when she could give them points at tennis or golf. And they wanted to protect her—with an insistence all the more urgent as there were so few weak little things about. It seemed to them intolerable that a very pretty girl should be allowed to go about unprotected. Her short-sightedness stabbed at their chivalry. They insisted on protecting her. And they felt she would be an inspiration to them, too, because she was so gentle.

At one time she found to her horror that she was engaged to three young men: a rising soldier, a rising politician, and a young man who edited a boys' paper but wanted to do bigger things. They all wanted to rise and do bigger things for her sake. They joined her to their careers in the most unmistakable way, made her responsible for their success.

It was flattering, but it was also wearing work, being

responsible for a great conqueror, a great statesman, and a great writer. So that was how they "got" one, was it, by making a poor girl responsible for their success and happiness. Her father took a philosophic view of this, saying that a woman must pay for having a good heart.

But she rebelled. She wrote the rising three a circular letter to the effect that there had been a misunderstanding, that she was unworthy of them, that she was sure she would not make a good wife to a rising man, and that anyhow, she was pledged to another. Later she wished she had left it at unworthiness and not put that in about being pledged to another.

Urged by each one of the three, but with particular intensity by the one who edited a boys' paper and now felt certain he would never do bigger things, to reveal the name of their successful rival, she in desperation got herself engaged—and for the last time, she promised herself—to a quiet young man called Giles Preston whom she had met while doing amateur theatricals. He was much the best actor she had met at amateur theatricals, but, unlike the tiresome young man who edited a boys' paper, that did not make him want to do bigger things on the real stage.

She felt that Mr. Preston—it somehow became natural to call him Mr. Preston—really did love her for her own sake and not as an incentive, an impetus, and an inspiration. Certainly poor Mr. Preston loved her silently. What a good thing that was! For she was in a state, after those endless heart-searching arguments with the disappointed and rising three, when being loved silently meant a very great deal to her. She felt that silence was by far the best part of love, if love there had to be. She began to think she might as well marry Mr. Preston and be done with it. Anyhow, she would not have to be responsible for his career, as he did not appear to have a career. He had been

an airman and was now waiting for something to turn up. She tried to overcome a certain reluctance to calling him Giles. She was eighteen years and five months old.

Her father and mother could not, however, approve of Mr. Preston as a possible son-in-law, for her father could afford to settle no more than £400 a year on his daughter, and poor Mr. Preston, ordinarily given to silence as he was, was particularly silent about his income.

Her father, who liked most people, liked Mr. Preston, and so did her mother, in a humorous way. Mr. Preston's father had been a moderately successful dramatist, now dead, but he was quite well connected on his mother's side.

Her mother provoked Lily Christine by refusing to take poor Mr. Preston seriously. Her mother was one of those great ladies who, never themselves having grown out of the most elementary snobberies, are always humorously convinced that young people will presently attain to their own high development. So she would have provoked Lily Christine into marrying poor Mr. Preston, had her destiny not led otherwhere.

Her mother felt she had the right to expect a fairly grand marriage for so successful a *débutante* as her daughter. Obviously there was a demand for Lily Christine, and the most should be made of it instead of throwing herself away on a young man who had not even a career but was waiting for something to turn up. So she began to refer to poor Mr. Preston as Mr. Micawber and to encourage the attentions of a wealthy young peer, whereupon what did Lily Christine do but become obsessed by poor Mr. Preston and refuse the light of her countenance to the wealthy young peer on the ground that he was a *Fathead*? And also she said she refused to be *Hawked About*.

That was the occasion of an unforgettable row between

Lily Christine and her mother. And in the course of it poor Mr. Preston, who had hitherto been quite an indefinite figure, grew and grew until he filled her future life. Right through that row he loomed inevitably, did poor Mr. Preston. For Lily Christine, usually so quiet, let herself go on the subject of marriage. She said the time was past when girls could be Hawked About and Sold to the Highest Bidder. She said the idea of marrying for money made her and every other girl Sick. She said the idea of marrying a man because he was a lord made her and every other girl Laugh. She said a girl married a decent man for love and companionship, especially companionship. She said she did not think much of love but that companionship was what mattered, and she said she was going to marry Mr. Preston and go and live with him somewhere in Yorkshire where he could get a job with a rich uncle who had something to do with mills.

"This is what comes of calling you by a foreign name," said her mother. "I was always against it."

For Lily Christine was called Lily Christine after her Austrian great-grandmother, Lily Christine von Sonnenwurst-Kalthaus. The good and beautiful Viennese had left behind her in the family a tradition of virtue and beauty, and Lily Christine had been called after her because her father was what is called a "great gentleman," which meant that he was quite ignorant of what went on around him but was in love with the past in a fumbling, unhappy, courteous way.

Thus Mr. Preston appeared to be winning all along the line and actually got as far as writing to his rich uncle in Yorkshire to say he would be wanting a job with him presently if something did not turn up in London. But it was not to be. Poor Mr. Preston! He was a good young man and his reward shall be in Heaven, for, not being a

rising young man on earth, to Heaven he shall surely ascend.

For Lily Christine no sooner met Ivor Summerest at a country-house party than she saw the man who matched her dreams of what a man should be and she saw in his eyes the shadow of her husband. While he, to give him his due, was drawn to her in the same way. And she fell in love with him so exceedingly, so blindly, and so trustfully, that in due course her father had to have an interview with the gallant soldier and famous cricketer.

The marriage of Lily Christine and Ivor Summerest was a love marriage. She loved him overwhelmingly, while he had a need for her which would not leave him alone. It mastered him, made him unlike himself, destroyed him as an individual. It was like a darkness, this need for her that would come upon him, an awful quivering darkness which he could not fight his way out of. She had to help him then, although at those times she was quite lost to herself in a swoon of love that was like pain. But it was wonderful to help him, wonderful. It was bliss to love him and comfort him, sheer bliss to enchant him out of the state of soul-destroying timidity, which his need for her would put upon him, back to his usual slow, blundering, remote self.

When this need for her was on him, he did not know what he was doing. So it was a good thing he really did love her and was not just passing the time, as he was in the habit of doing. For it was in consequence of what happened—during the fourth week-end party to which Lily Christine had got herself asked, so that she might sit quiet and be near Ivor, who had as yet seemed hardly to notice her—that he and Lily Christine's favourite partner had to have that interview. For she had given the show away in a fit of girlish hysterics which she was never able to account for.

Summerest emerged from the interview looking very stern and remote and, she thought with a stab of love, lost. He was a big, clumsy-looking man with a small, fine head, a fresh-coloured, blonde, slow speaking man. His pale eyes were slow to light up with laughter, and then again you could see the anger slowly moving to the back of them, a blue-lit, stony, blue-staring anger.

But what she loved in them was a look —she had seen the same in the eyes of peasants who had knocked off work for a minute's rest —of expecting something unknown.

Her favourite parent looked stern too, on emerging from the interview, but at the same time he looked rather abashed, as though wrestling with the devil had turned out to be very poor sport and quite unnecessary. Lily Christine could not help feeling that her father, who liked nothing so much as spending long afternoons at Lords' or the Oval, would have minded the devil a great deal more if he had not also been a 'Test Match' player.

But her mother had no idea whatsoever on cricket beyond a deep conviction that it was somehow connected with the general rightness of better-class Englishmen. Her disappointment at finding there were gaps in that connection was profound and, as her father put it to Lily Christine, "really rather alarming."

After Lily Christine's unaccountable attack of girlish hysterics, her mother had refused even to mention the man's name until her husband had first talked to him. So Lily Christine held her breath when, as Ivor emerged from the interview, her mother met him for the first time.

Ivor continued to look stern and remote, but she fancied that the tip of his short straight nose was quivering in a funny way it had when he was so nervous he did not know what to do. He gave her a quick, helpless, begging

look. She at once took off her spectacles, for then she could see him only as a blur, which was a great help to her peace of mind.

Her mother gave him a long look. She was very erect and handsome and calm.

"I was coming to see Sir George to-day, anyhow," Ivor said in his slow, ruminating voice in which there was so often a deep note of bewilderment.

"To ask for Lily Christine?" her mother said quietly.

"Yes."

"She is our only child, Mr. Summerest. Don't you think you have put us in a very uncomfortable position?"

Her father, dear old man, jerked forward.

"My dear, we have discussed it all. Everything is arranged."

Ivor's big body moved restlessly, seeking to escape, but with a queer, poignant humility.

But her mother held him. There was no getting away from her in the cold, sad, shattered mood she was in.

Lily Christine had never admired her mother so much as at that moment. So dignified and handsome she was, so calm in her unhappiness. And suddenly she was very, very sorry for her mother. It was as though for years and years her mother had been someone unreal, and now suddenly she stood there a sad and disappointed woman. What a pity it was that her mother should be so sad while she was so happy. What a pity it was that she had not been able to please her mother about her marriage.

And suddenly Lily Christine broke down and wept, which was really quite a good thing, for it deflectcd her mother's attention just as she was about to say a few sharp words to Ivor, and while she was deflected, Ivor was helped by her favourite parent to disappear.

However her mother said to her father:

"You tell me the man is a famous cricketer?"

"Yes, my dear. He reminds one of the great amateurs of the past."

"Does he? Then let us hope that in the future he will not reserve his eminence in playing the game entirely to the playing fields."

But her mother never forgave Ivor, and there was always a coldness between them. In the end Lily Christine gave up even trying to persuade her to unbend to Ivor. There was no denying that her mother had been outraged in her deepest feelings, and as Ivor was penniless she continued to be outraged in her deepest feelings. But when Lily Christine's children came, her mother cared for them so dearly that now and then she forgot to be anything but amiable to their father.

This early part of Lily Christine's life cannot be dismissed without a word more about that fit of girlish hysterics which precipitated the famous interview. And in this way we shall have the pleasure of meeting Mr. Parwen, for it was to that sensitive gentleman's devoted and distressed ears that the hysterics revealed their message of woe.

Neville Parwen was Lily Christine's first cousin, but by temperament he was her uncle. At this time he was an elderly gentleman of about thirty--an upright, intelligent man, fine-textured and fine-mannered, without much humour. But on occasions he had a slightly humorous manner, which did just as well. He was tall and thin, with a round, fresh face and earnest blue eyes, and he wore his slightly wavy hair a little longer than men usually do, and his fine dark clothes were cut in an indefinitely old-world way. His voice was rather high and very precise, and very easy to mimic. But no one ever called him affected, for he was so obviously not affected. His father, Lily Christine's mother's brother, was a Cabinet Minister.

Neville Parwen had lately married an upright, intelligent woman of his own age, and they were already settled down in Brompton Square to a life of quiet but active seriousness. His voice was rather high and hers was on low deep notes, very pleasant when you knew her but frightening to strangers. In the course of time the Parwens became known to a wide circle of friends as the Pegaways. They pegged away at whatever they took up, and that was not a little. They made, each in a different medium, sound reputations as writers. Parwen was a hard-working Civil Servant, but he found time to write a number of books that won him an honourable name as a student of letters and history. Mrs. Parwen wrote several obscure novels, but it was as a good sound poet of modern but the not eccentric school that she made her reputation.

Neville Parwen was, of course, as one of the family to his aunt's house. His unselfish devotion to Lily Christine ever since her childhood was respected by everyone. His wife shared it, in her deep, silent way. He would very often drop in at Lowndes Square on his way home to Brompton Square.

One Monday he found his aunt out, his uncle writing letters in his study, and Lily Christine alone in the little sitting-room upstairs which had come to be looked on as her own. Lily Christine said, "Oh, Nappie!" rang for some more tea, and relapsed into thought.

Parwen asked her how she had enjoyed her week-end, and she said very much. He knew that Summerest had been there, and that was why she had so eagerly gone. Several weeks ago she had confided in him that her heart popped into her mouth every time she saw Ivor Summerest, and he had teased her about that.

Summerest was very much of a young girl's fancy, and Lily Christine would not have been a natural girl of

eighteen or so if she had not taken a fancy to a good-looking young buck now and then. But Neville Parwen was not at all concerned about her. He was quite positive that she was not yet in love with anyone. And he was also quite positive that when she did fall in love it would be for ever, she would never change. He had watched her very carefully, had Neville Parwen, and would continue to do so. But in the meanwhile why not let a girl have her fancies ?

" Well, Lily Christine, and how goes the great love ? "

She was busy pouring out tea for him.

" Found him out yet ? " he smiled.

She gave him his tea. " Found what out, Nappie ? "

" Well, he's not very bright, is he ? "

" Oh no, he's not very bright. . . . "

He sipped his tea thoughtfully. He could see that Lily Christine did not feel talkative. He fancied she looked a little white, a little worried. She was subject to headaches. A headache usually meant that she had been trying to cut a dash by not wearing spectacles for a whole week-end. Well, she would grow out of that soon enough.

" Got a headache, dear ? "

" Yes, Nappie, a little."

" Like to be alone ? "

" Oh no ! I've been alone all afternoon."

" What, sitting in here all by yourself ! "

She nodded blindly, quickly turning her head from him.

'This wouldn't do. Neville Parwen was faintly puzzled. He went on sipping his tea thoughtfully.

" Anything the matter, child ? "

" No dear, nothing at all."

He fancied she was very near tears. There were tears in her voice. It might be as well to sit quiet and let her

have her cry out if she could. He sat quiet, a little anxious.

And the soul of Lily Christine was sick with anguish.

Nappie's kindness and love and trust were too much for her to bear. It was awful to be deceiving him.

All day long fear had been growing, and now her whole life was dark with fear. As for love, she did not dare think of love. Oh, what had she done, what had she done? And fear wrapped its black wings around her and blinded her so that she could not see Ivor any more, she simply could not. And all she had thought of was to comfort him! Until then he had seemed so masterful and remote, and suddenly he had come to her, so timid and miserable. Oh, she had wanted to comfort him, to soothe away that dark, shy brooding. And it was as though his yearning timidity had put a hand into her body and taken her heart out. And she was his.

But all day long fear had been beating at her, she was like pulp, and she felt she was never to see him again, that she was to be punished terribly. Oh, what had she done, what had she done? And there Nappie sat, loving her and trusting her, and thinking that everything was still at the humorous stage.

She began sobbing quietly, hoping he would not hear. But she could not control her sobs, they ran away with her, she could not hold them, they made a mock of her, she could not, could not master them, and they betrayed her. And presently, Neville Parwen, putting his own feelings to one side, and determined to like Summerest since she loved him, thought it was his plain duty to go downstairs and tell her father that the time had come for Lily Christine to marry the man she loved.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN she married, Lily Christine began to pour out her love helter-skelter. She was not quite nineteen years old.

It was no use wiser women telling her that if she wanted her husband to get tired of her, she was going the right way about it. It was no use their telling her that she was so young and that they both had a long course before them and that trouble was always waiting in the long grass.

She could not help it. She tried to, but vaguely, without enthusiasm. She soon decided that she was one of the weak ones who have done so much to make women the downtrodden creatures they are—or, anyhow, were. She turned out to be surprisingly deficient in what people called Pride. It might be a good thing, of course, if she had more Pride—which apparently meant not doing what you want to do so that you will enjoy doing it more later on. Sometimes she felt that maybe she ought not to be so accessible. She felt so accessible to Ivor.

She was very willing that Ivor should discipline her, as he was so much older and wiser. Now and then he would pull her up quite sharply, but on the whole she amused him more than any girl had amused him before. Quite a number of girls had amused him before, or rather they had made him feel like crying.

For Summerest was a slow-thinking, sentimental man. His moods and passions were of the blood, and so, no matter what he did, he was innocent. But he did not know that. Often he felt very guilty indeed. Tears poured easily through the hollows of his soul and the

fondness and frailty of women made him feel what a beast he was.

And even there Lily Christine did not fail him, for her kindness and childlike trust gave him unlimited opportunities to feel what a beast he was. He had always found being in love inseparable from feeling what a beast he was. That worried him a great deal, but what was he to do?

Often, as he wondered clumsy about her, he had to remind himself that she was only a child yet. For there were times when she gave him an uncomfortable feeling that she loved him more than was good for her. But surely to Heaven she was a bride equal to a man's dreams! She was far too good for him, he never had a doubt. She gave him a queer hot thrill of a kind he had never experienced before. And he found himself in strange dark depths, hand in hand with his love. But sometimes discomfort followed. He felt isolated from his fellow-men. He felt . . . odd . . . shocked. This in turn gave way to a sort of pride that he had it in him to feel such depths of passion. Sometimes he would not let her take her spectacles off as she lay in his arms. She laughed at such dark, burning moods, but in her there was an answering quivering understanding, too, and she went with him, her first love and her dear love and her love for ever.

Those large silly looking American spectacles gave her lovely small face a look of unearthly childishness and tenderness, and he loved her so that it was like a blow to return to consciousness. Then he would feel uncomfortable, uneasy. He wondered if he should tell her not to be so . . . inflammatory. There were times when she forgot herself too completely in him, and made him uncomfortable. At the back of his mind was a dim idea that a man's wife should be on the cold side.

Then it all somehow changed, almost before he knew where he was. In point of fact, the change had come gradually and inevitably, but a fellow does not notice such things. Women were unaccountable. One day she would be talking to beat the band, and the next she would fall to long, long silences in which he simply could not get *at* her.

He could not understand her. These long silences of hers, when he actually had to rouse her who had been so accessible, seemed to him quite blank. But blank was just what they were not, and that was what he had to learn.

But he hated learning anything that had to do with development. Change he could understand, the shallow changing from one shallow pastime to another. A darkness of anger swept over him at profound, ungetatable changes.

He was at odds with her in his very soul. He hated to find that she was different from him, cast in a different mould, unassailably and un-touchably different. But he could not express this, even to himself. He felt no more than a sticky far-away discomfort, that something was going wrong where, if she had been as "normal" as he was, nothing could ever have gone wrong.

There were times when, in his subconsciousness, he hated her passionately. What right had she to these disturbing, damnable developments? It was treachery to him. Development seemed to him treachery, a cad's trick.

He had married a Lily Christine eighteen years and ten months old, and, although he had thought her rather childish—that she gave herself away a little too readily, that she needed steadyng here and there—it had never occurred to him that she could change, that she could ever take herself or him with an uneasy seriousness, that

she would ever grow up from being a girl in love into a wife. For that was what Lily Christine did grow up into, and she took being a wife seriously.

In two years, by the time she was twenty-one, she outgrew the playgrounds of love. She had played feverishly, absurdly, deliciously, she had enjoyed herself enormously, and then she grew up.

It took her some time to realize that Ivor wasn't having any, that he did not want to grow up. It took her some time to realize that the boy who never grows up, adorable in story and legend, presents certain inconveniences as a partner in the business of life.

The trouble with her was, that her mind worked. And her desires did not get fat on satisfying themselves, but grew, expanded, thinned blissfully, and rose to the empyrean.

And so her love for Ivor grew up and became greater than herself.

How they were squandering it, this love, this glorious happiness! That was the word her unrest flung at her, squander, squander. Had they been given this love to squander as they pleased, this happiness to breathe in blissfully for all their days, shutting themselves off from the world on their tiny island of indulgence?

And she could not get rid of a culpable sense of licence. The shrill secret voices of blame were ever calling to her, tormenting her. Do what she would, lap herself in love and happiness as she would, she could not rid herself of that sense of licence, of wrong-doing. Wasn't there some duty calling to her, and she did not come?

In the end, of course, unrest worked its own cure and her salvation.

Between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five, Lily Christine bore her husband three children. She could not bring forth children easily, lightly, like many of her

friends. But she did not envy them. There was a deep, satisfying solace in her pain. She passed through much illness and suffering. And then, when the third child was born dead, she nearly died and was ill for long weeks.

After that she was not allowed to bear any more children. That was the most wretched day of her life when she was told that. Passionately she wanted children — illogical though she knew that longing to be, for she did not feel she was peculiarly called on to be a mother or peculiarly fitted to bear and bring up children. Indeed, she felt painfully that she was not. But she wanted children. It was wonderful to love and be loved by her husband, but the bliss of love was in the weight of a child in her womb. To know herself, to be utterly complete, to lie still, embosomed in the rich drowsiness that only comes when you need nothing from outside, nothing — Oh, that was bliss !

Always she had a reverence for life, and that was intensified a thousand times during the process of gestation. It was sheer happiness. How wonderful it was to live, to know herself, to beget life ! How wonderful it was to be alone, to lie still and be petted by the calm, wise fingers of fruitful loneliness. Alone, she felt bliss surging over her like streams of sunshine, and she wept with happiness. Day after day she would lie, forgetful of her agony, enchanted into rich, drowsy reveries by her happiness. How happy she was, how lucky she was, how she loved her husband, how good it was to be alive !

But now she must not bear any more children.

Now she must get back into life, into what was called the "central" stream. How silly it was to call anything that wasn't lonely "central" ! There was and could be nothing "central" outside of the rich loneliness she had known. There it was that she had known love, life,

happiness, her husband. But now she must go back and see what the others were doing. She must find Ivor. . . .

Lily Christine was married in that muddled year 1920, and after that she and Ivor had lived a muddled life and their friends were muddled young people with muddled ideas. But in all this muddle Lily Christine's love for her husband was always a definite, clear-cut fact, and by their muddled friends it was recognized as that.

All the same, their came a time when their friends did not at all understand Lily Christine. Here she was, up and about at last, done with child-bearing for ever and didn't she see what was going on? No, they could not quite fit her into their muddled ideas of behaviour. They began to think she must be rather a fool. Obviously, she still loved Ivor. Then why wasn't she jealous, why didn't she put her foot down, why didn't she make Ivor work and behave himself like the husband of one of the most beautiful young women in London?

Instead, she actually took to trying to make money herself. And she and Ivor seemed very happy together. It was surprising how happy they were. It really was very surprising.

Then her friends began to realize in their muddled way that although Ivor did not keep to the straight and narrow path there was only one woman he loved, and that was Lily Christine. They saw that what they had dreaded could not come to pass, that there could not be any question of his leaving her. He was just a sentimental man who liked to pass his time with fluffy pieces of nonsense. But he clung to Lily Christine, he needed her even more than she needed him.

. And so her friends who had always loved her, began to admire her too, saying that she was really very clever about her life. It was wonderful how clever she was, they said, and at the same time quite honest about things, facing the

facts. And that was how Lily Christine's integrity became as an admirable institution among those muddled young people in that muddled, desolate corner of London which used to shine with such a fine glitter in the history of privilege.

Summerest's goings-on began a little while before the birth of her second child, Timothy. And although her friends did Lily Christine the honour of their reticence, she knew quite well that Ivor was being unfaithful to her. But she also knew quite well that he could not be unfaithful to what was between them.

This knowledge came as a surprise to her, for she had always dreaded this moment of realization as one that she would find terrible, intolerable, but now she knew that he could not be unfaithful to her, not if he tried. For what he was doing was nothing to do with her, she was not concerned in it. It was a great comfort to feel that. And in the end she had to plead with her friends not to bother to be so reticent about Ivor's pieces of nonsense, for it put such a constraint on the conversation.

It never had seemed to her surprising that Ivor did not love her in the complete way she loved him. She rather pitied him for that, as one who has faith must pity one who has not. She had not bargained with equality in love when she married. There was not any question of equality in such things. What a *silly* word that was—equality! So she did not think she was hardly used. She had her two lovely children, very much Ivor's children in looks. She had Ivor's love. And so she was thankful.

But it made her sad sometimes that she saw so little of him now. "Shall I nag him a bit to take me out more?" she wondered. But nagging gave her no pleasure at all.

It was not until after the long illness following her third baby, the one that died, that she finally realized that their love affair was over. Lily Christine was getting

on for twenty-six then. An age, she told herself, when a woman should face wifhood and no nonsense.

What had happened to Ivor was really quite simple. He had had to do without her for some time, and now he was a bachelor who happened to be married. He wasn't a responsible man, that was what it was. Well, the world was full of such, else it might be a more peaceful world. One day, no doubt, he would get tired of that, tired of this irresponsible leaning on one unessential thing after another.

The unessential things. How good it would be for men's sense of proportion if, for just for a short time, they had a taste of child-bearing. Or wasn't it just that child-bearing that overbalanced women's sense of proportion, made them think the world revolved around them, made them think they were pivotal, made them want and expect too much, made them exalt their petty, selfish needs and miseries to a false high plane of fruitful, sacrificing womanhood that was forever being bruised by the selfishness of men?

So she wasn't sure. She got into a state of saying to herself: "I must *not* make Small points." Was she right? She wasn't sure. She knew she was weak.

When she went into his bedroom she found it full of photographs of pretty girls. The "pieces of nonsense." Yes, he was attractive to them; he was a very attractive man. That blundering, masterful maleness and that soft, insidious, yearning timidity. Yes, they gave way to him, thinking he needed them. But really he did not. Always at the back of him he kept something cold, subtle intact, watchful. The weeping sentimental, yes, but also the proud, subtle, selfish male.

And who, in the end, would his selfishness hurt but himself? So one day he would find out that he was a very lonely man. Or had he an uneasy understanding of that

now, and that was why he seemed to cling to her, seemed to wrap his blundering mind about her with a beseeching bewilderment? The old cart-house!

So it was she came to understand that she was at last face to face with marriage, and that marriage needed managing. It was in her hands whether their marriage was a wreck or not. It was not wrecked yet; it was as yet only another of the forlorn, rudderless craft that she could see all about her. But she must manage this thing, she must settle their direction. She was the grown-up one.

To begin with, she knew she *must* make a mess of it if she worried whether Ivor loved her or not. If she began worrying about that, she would be forever making small points against him, forever scoring off his blundering animal-like sense of wrong-doing. She must *not* make small points against him. That would be a desecration of herself. And it would be no good rubbing it into him that he was doing wrong, for then the core of him would gradually become wrong. No, she must make up her mind that she had lost nothing of Ivor but unessentials, and live according.

And that was what she did. She lived "according."

At this time their chronic lack of money was a great help to her. It made her laugh, realizing that, for the lack of money had bothered her so incessantly. But now she could work, fill up the time.

What an incessant bother this question of money had been from the day of their marriage! There had been times when she simply did not know which way to turn to make ends meet. There had been times when the ends did not meet and did not look like meeting ever again. There had been wrecks. But at the breaking point Ivor always had a surprising way of turning up with a packet of money.

They had their first great quarrel when she found that he

was in the habit of borrowing. It made her so burningly ashamed. But he was indifferent about money, quite amoral. He had no sense of money except as a medium for gambling, could not be bothered with it, did not care how he got it or how he spent it. But he was very concerned at the way she took his borrowing, and so he promised he would not any more, and after that whenever she found him rolling in money he said he had won at racing or at bridge. He was a very good bridge-player, a fact she never could get over, for the game quite baffled her.

Lily Christine had that settlement of £400 a year, and then there were odd bits which her favourite parent managed to give her now and then. But after she was twenty-one she would not accept any more odd bits from him, for the poor old man had all he could do to manage as it was. Ivor had nothing but what he "made," and sometimes he made quite large sums. But it was very precarious. Not at all the way to live. A corrupting sort of life, that was what it was.

How they managed at all Lily Christine could not tell. Bills, bills, bills. And sometimes nothing to pay them with, nothing at all. Yet Ivor always seemed to have enough actual coin of the realm on him to take her to the most expensive restaurants. In fact, they seemed to live a very expensive life—on next to no money. Sometimes the telephone would be cut off because she could not pay the bill. The next day Ivor might give her a diamond bracelet, and she was silly enough to like diamond bracelets.

But she never could be like Ivor in taking such a muddled life as it came, not worrying. It worried her incessantly, but what could she do? She was not the strong robust type of woman who could go out and hustle herself into a good soft job. And it was no good telling Ivor to get one, because he already had a job

in the City. It seemed a funny sort of a job to Lily Christine, an ideal job for a man who liked cricket, golf, racing, and gambling.

For six months in the year Ivor would be playing cricket all over England, and he also managed to put in a good deal of time at the races. Still, he was a lucky punter, and plunged for amounts which took her breath away. At bridge he seldom played for less than one-and-six a point, and how glad she was he did not tell her of his losses! Now and then she would fancy he was brooding, and then she would know he must be in for a streak of bad luck. How he found the money to pay losses of hundreds of pounds she did not dare to think. Then his luck would veer back, and although he never told her of his losses he was always very generous with what he won, suddenly giving her cheques for two or three hundred pounds - or fat wads of banknotes. They always went quickly enough in paying bills.

In winter he complained a good deal of his liver and would always be going down to Sandwich to play golf. But after Christmas he would get restless. He had that curious blank-faced taste for following the crowd which was like a mucky little germ boring into the cores of so many of the strong-looking men she knew. What was it, the Public School idea of a Good Time? So he would insist on dragging her to Monte Carlo for a few weeks. He was uneasy at Cannes but liked Monte Carlo, saying he liked common places to be frankly common, like Monte Carlo and Margate, and not put on airs, as Cannes and Deauville did.

He was a magnificent gambler, and though she was terrified it thrilled her to watch him risking four or five times their yearly income on a *banco*. He was so calm and natural, not pretending to be indifferent or anything like that, not at all like an Englishman gambling. For she

noticed that the Englishmen at the high tables were usually by far the fussiest and most bothered of the queer nationalities present. They weren't really gamblers, they were just out for a Good Time, and it bothered them when their Good Time began to cost them a packet. She was like that herself.

So far as Lily Christine could see, his chiefs in the City did not expect Ivor to work for his six or seven hundred a year—he never seemed to know which it was—but just liked having him about. She supposed they liked having England's finest amateur cricketer around as a sort of glorified office boy, to read of him in the newspapers one day and have him at the office the next.

She never got over her surprise at the influence of cricket on men's minds. Because Ivor was a great cricketer men sympathized with his financial embarrassments, were quite eager to lend him money, and forgave him long, long lapses of memory.

It never seemed to worry Ivor, this hand-to-mouth way of living. He trusted to his luck, everything would be all right. But there was one thing he did not want to happen to him, and that was bankruptcy. It was queer in a man so indifferent to questions of money, this horror of the idea of bankruptcy.

The only time Lily Christine had ever seen him really put out about his affairs was when a friend who had lent him a large sum of money a year before suddenly cut up rough and declared he would either have his money back or make him bankrupt. Ivor pretended to laugh it off to her, but she could see he really was in a state, and she was much more indignant than he was with his friend, in fact she never spoke to the poor man again. Finally it was her father who helped Ivor out of that mess, although she did not get to know that until long after.

How she hated the feeling of a sword always hanging

over her! And she knew it was terribly bad for the children to be brought up in this hand-to-mouth atmosphere. Corrupting, corrupting. But when at last it came to *doing* something, she did not feel at all hopeful ; she was certain she had not the sort of temperament to which money comes in anything like satisfactory quantities.

Ivor admired her no end when he found that she really was intending to make money and not just playing at it, like some of their friends. At that time he was having a longish streak of bad luck and so he could not help with any capital, but he suggested she might try Neville Parwen. It was then that she asked him why, since cricket was the one thing he could do really well, he did not become a professional and make a honest living by it? Never again did she ask him such a silly question. He went quite white and muttered something that sounded like : "God, one sometimes wonders what English-women are coming to!"

At that time there were quite a number of girls and young women of that sort—as there are now, increasingly—who were setting out to make what money they could. There were unkind Americans who said the English upper-classes were learning to give Jews points as money-grubbers, that the Americans were becoming gentry while the English could think of nothing but money, and that not in any other country in the world did one hear money talked about so much. That was what unkind Americans said, but it is well known that the rich man resents the perseverance of his poor brother who will not admit his inferiority but quietly pays his debts.

Of these well-born young women, some worked really hard at whatever they undertook because they had to, some from avarice, using the advantages of name and

rank to make all they could from snobs in the shortest possible time, while others were merely silly, idle women in search of new distractions.

Lily Christine was encouraged by several examples of financial success among her friends. She was amazed at the way they were succeeding. And the ones who were had never struck her as particularly intelligent, either. They had courage, that was it, and confidence. And also, she uncomfortably felt, they had a queer hard something tucked away inside them which made them enjoy *using* their friends.

Some of the most innocent-faced young women she knew revealed an astonishing talent for using their friends to the best advantage. A few made quite a good thing out of that new kind of journalism, the "gossipy" kind which made one hot merely to glance at it. Or people said it did. But what did the women who wrote that stuff care if their friends began to look rather sideways at them for fear of what might be in to-morrow's paper—or didn't their friends like it, the day by day "chatty" references to what this one had worn and the other had done?

When it came to getting a job, Lily Christine found to her astonishment that she could slip into the oddest employments merely for the asking. She had not realized before that her name was anything of an asset, that the continual references to her and the photographs of her since her "coming out," and also the fact that she was Ivor Summerrest's wife, could ever be turned into money.

But now she found she was offered quite nice bits of money, either as salary or commission, for very little more than lending her name. She could be the nominal manager of this or that, and all she would have to do would be to get her friends to come and to give out all the interviews she could to the Press. All the people who

offered her such jobs seemed to know quite well that she was a friend of Lord Townleigh's, the newspaper magnate. It was amazing, the things they seemed to know about her.

She told herself she was being silly, but she could not help wilting away from those jobs. "Make them pay, what do you care?" Ivor grinned at her. But she found she could not do it, she had not the stuff in her.

She did play for a while with the idea of "managing" a beauty-parlour, and had several interviews with the ambitious proprietor, a sleek young man with a hairless pink-and-white face and odd swaying gestures and a very demoralizing way of moving from his hips. He offered her a salary of £800 a year and commission on all the custom she brought in for her presencee at the beauty-parlour every afternoon from three to four-thirty. But in the end she could not do it, she had not the stuff in her. Lovely little Lois Crest took the job instead, and a very good thing she made out of it. Little Lois was so capable that she actually bullied Lily Christine into going to the place for one quite unnecessary treatment which cost ten and six.

So, since she would not do this or the other, she was advised that what she must do was to lay her hands on a few hundred pounds, rent a shop in some quiet but getatable street, stick a few hats or cigarette-cases or antique shawls, handkerchiefs, or underclothes in the window, use the newspapers for as many paragraphs as they would give her and ask her friends to come round.

Her friends would then come round and do one of four things : (a) be charming and look at everything and say they would come back another day but forget to : (b) buy a little something and pay for it ; (c) buy quite a good deal and so of course run up an account, and only after repeated requests over several months be brought to pay, and be beastly about her for ever after : (d) buy a great

deal and forget to pay no matter how often she reminded them, but always be charming about her behind her back.

Lily Christine's friends fell, of course, into classification (c) and (d).

It was a book shop she would have liked to open, but finally she went into the market with underclothes in a tiny shop near Claridge's. She was able to embark on this venture only because Neville Parwen and his wife insisted on investing a few hundred pounds in the business.

That was very kind of them, but she would much rather have borrowed the capital from a stranger. Money dealings with even the most intimate friends made her very self-conscious ; in fact, the more intimate they were the hotter she felt, and she would so lose her head about *not* trading on friendship that for all the benefits she got from the transaction she might just as well have gone to the hardest-headed money-lender in Jermyn Street. So she insisted upon having the arrangement drawn up by a lawyer in a very business-like way, in which she was to pay the Parwens 7 per cent. on their investment. She insisted on 7 per cent. because 7 was a lucky number.

Mary Devon, who went into the business with her, very sensibly borrowed her share of the capital from a hopeful young American polo player who could wring your heart with a ukulele, on the friendly understanding that she would pay it back when she could. Mary was not very reliable, and Lily Christine took her in against her better judgment because Mary pleaded so. She worked very hard for a few weeks and then remembered that it was the season and left everything to Lily Christine. But Mary Devon had no children.

The shop began very well, the friends—(c) and (d)—turning up in strength, and the "turn over" for the first

six months was wonderful. Lily Christine was on her feet all day and every day, so that she scarcely had time to see Julia and Timothy before their bedtime, but the nurse-maid Stokes would sometimes bring them to the shop for an hour or so, and they were a great success.

But as the year came to its end Lily Christine began to feel hopeless and over-tired. She was not robust, and the work was too hard for her. Also, she felt in herself an incapacity for business ; she felt unreal as a business woman. But, taking a leaf from the Parwen's book, she pegged away.

At the end of the first year she found that, after having worked eight to nine hours a day on five days of the week, she had made enough to pay off her debts, the interest on the Parwen money, and a profit of £23. There was money owing to her from friends, but she felt hopeless about getting any of it. It seemed so silly to work herself to the bone for £23 when Ivor made hundreds by the flick of a card.

Neville Parwen said she had done much better than anyone could have expected, but he was concerned for her health if she went on working so hard. Ivor, on the rare occasions she saw him during the cricketing season, backed up Mary Devon's advice to chuck it. And when Lily Christine asked what she was to do next, he laughed and said, what had they always done ? So she felt the messiness of the hand-to-mouth existence enveloping her and her children. She felt she never would get away from it, that she had not the stuff in her, and she felt she was useless and a failure.

But, as Ivor said, what did it matter ? why not take things as they came ? what was the use of worrying ?

A week or so before the pleasant adventure with our incapable friend Harvey, an uncomfortable incident happened in the shop. It was laughable too, and of course,

Lily Christine had to laugh at it, but at the same time she resented the incident. It left a mark, as the saying is.

She had taken a few weeks' holiday in July, lying in the sun on the rocks at Cap d'Antibes (which, even so short a while ago, was not the crowded summer resort it is now), but she was staying in London in August, as she had much to do clearing up. For now she had almost made up her mind to give up the shop, and was only waiting for a favourable offer to sell out. Julia and Timothy were visiting friends at the seaside, kind rich friends who could do so much more for them than their inefficient mother.

One afternoon, when Lily Christine happened to be alone in the shop, her assistant (aged sixteen) being out on some errand, a young lady came in and asked to be shown things—the best.

Very ladylike she was, and very pretty in a fluffy self-conscious way. Men would have thought her very well dressed. She spoke very carefully, and Lily Christine could not help fancying she had seen her somewhere before, maybe at some friend's house as a smart pretty parlour-maid, and now, lo ! she had risen in the world and wanted only the best.

The pretty young lady began fingering chemises and drawers and night-gowns, the most expensive ones.

Lily Christine, turning to go on with her stock taking, fancied the young lady looked at her now and then in a curious way, not very nicely, rather appraisingly. Well ! She went on with her work, taking no notice.

The pretty young lady held up a night-dress, a lovely simple thing that Lily Christine would dearly have liked to buy for herself. But she thought they were much too expensive, even at wholesale prices.

"Aren't these *very* plain ?" the young lady said.

"They are the best we have," Lily Christine said,

wondering if the young lady wanted to look at pictures during the night.

Then she found that the pretty young lady was looking at her in a puzzled, unfriendly way. Lily Christine had no patience with her, and turned to her work again.

"But do you mean," the young lady asked in her high, careful voice, "that . . . people wear these?"

Lily Christine put down her pencil, and smiled.

"The ones who can afford them do, I suppose, else I couldn't make a living, could I?"

"But I mean . . . people in Society?"

"Oh, Society! I don't know, I'm sure."

She went on with her work again, unable to carry on the conversation on that high plane.

"Well, I didn't come in here to be kidded!" the young lady said bitterly. "I know you're Mrs. Summerest, all right."

Lily Christine went on with her work, thinking it best not to answer. Besides, the young lady might buy something. So she wanted to hear what "Society" wore, did she? Well, why shouldn't she? She was pretty enough, prettier than most. Good luck to her.

Lily Christine suddenly rose, lifted down a box, opened it, and put it before the young lady.

"These are being worn a great deal lately," she said, and went back to her work again, leaving the pretty young lady to examine the drawers at her leisure.

"Well!" said the young lady doubtfully. "They *are* pretty, aren't they!"

Lily Christine, looking up, found the young lady eyeing her rather anxiously.

"Yes, I wear those," she said encouragingly.

The pretty young lady who would obviously have liked something more ornamental for the money, began doubtfully selecting from the box.

And suddenly Lily Christine, looking at the young lady's pretty profile, flushed crimson.

Really, really, how silly she was ! What was there to be in a state about ? But this was the first time she had ever met one of Ivor's pieces of nonsense, and she never had thought she *would* meet one. She had recognized the young lady by her profile as one of the photographs in Ivor's room, the latest. Well ! The cheek of her, coming into the shop to have a good look ! And wanting to wear what "Society" wore, so that Ivor could feel quite at home !

She had heard lately that Ivor was spending his off-times from cricket with an engineer's wife. Well, he must be a pretty fluffy engineer to have a wife like that. Poor man ! Probably he worked so hard for the money she was throwing away on what "Society" wore. The things people did ! Coming into the shop to have a look at her ! Poor little thing, no doubt she fancied herself in love with Ivor and was quite arrogant about possessing him and disdainful of the fine "Society" wife who could not hold him, not dreaming that in a few weeks he would be tired of her and be going on to another pretty little thing as like her as one chocolate-cream to another.

Quite composed, she at last turned to find the pretty young lady still fingering and selecting. And she wanted to say to her : " You little fool, why waste your husband's money ? And Ivor never notices such things." But what she said was : " They are very expensive, you know."

" Thank you, I can afford them," the pretty young lady said with a nervous laugh. " I'll take these."

Lily Christine, her mind a blank, her face expressionless, totted up the young lady's bill. She made the young lady pay cash. The young lady looked as though she wanted to say something, but Lily Christine's frozen face unnerved her and she went out giggling nervously.

Lily Christine laughed at the incident, but she resented the pretty young lady. She couldn't be nice, to believe like that. She began to feel quite catty about the pretty young lady. Next time she saw Ivor she said that one of his pieces of nonsense had been to the shop and how glad she was he put his wife in the way of making an honest penny. But she was sorry as soon as she had spoken, and she felt she had been a beastly cat to the pretty young lady, for certainly she had cooked her goose with Ivor for ever. For Ivor would not have his wife put upon in any way, not he.

Lily Christine felt slightly mocking about that ; she would have liked to jeer at him, but she did not say anything.

He looked dark and angry, and Lily Christine could see that in future the pretty young lady would sigh in vain for handsome Ivor. Well, the poor engineer would be the gainer ; that was a good thing.

And although Lily Christine felt sorry she had ever said a word to ruin the pretty young lady's prospects of a nice time, and also that she had sold her underclothes under false pretences, at the same time she was glad that Ivor had looked angry and that he would not have his wife put upon. It was reassuring. And so, in spite of his silly goings-on, for if it was not one pretty young lady it would be another, she felt safe and secure with him.

CHAPTER V



HE left Harvey's house early that Sunday morning, her host having procured her a young man in a large check cap from a garage in Southampton. She was seen off in grand style by Harvey and his heirs, John and James, and she was quite sad at leaving such friends. But she made Harvey promise to come to see her in London, and to bring his wife, too.

The young man from Southampton said he was a mechanic rather than a chauffeur, but he drove with a fine dash, at the same time making polite conversation.

Lily Christine, like a great number of people who like to drive fast themselves, was as nervous as a puppy when anyone drove *her* fast. It made her anxious to sit doing nothing in a car ; she kept on mentally driving it and pointing out to herself the mistakes the driver was making. But the young man from Southampton drove with such cheerful confidence that she had not the heart to say anything. They were at home in London in no time.

Lily Christine, fitting the latchkey into the door, was wondering how much money she had in the house, for she would like to give the cheerful young man a good tip, when the door was flung open from within and who should be there standing but Ivor !

" Ivor ! Oh, good ! I didn't expect you till to-night at earliest ! "

And the dismal London Sunday instantly became bright and full.

But Ivor seemed almost angry that he had not found

her at home, angry as a man is who has dashed home to give his wife a surprise only to find she is not at home and he must wait for her.

"Couldn't be more soured-up," he said, using a long-dead phrase of Lily Christine's. "Here I come dashing home in the dawn—and no one knows even where you are! Coghill says he expected you last night."

"Yes, but I broke my spectacles. Look. And I had such a nice adventure, Ivor."

She was going to tell him about Harvey, but Ivor was still on the door-step, looking at the Hawk-Ellis with interest. He had an eye for a car, that was his trouble.

The cheerful young man from Southampton, standing on the curb, touched his large check cap at her and grinned pleasantly.

"Nice day, sir. We came up fine." And he looked at Lily Christine as though he would like her to back him up about that. He was no more than a blur to her, but she felt he would like backing up.

"You drove beautifully," she said. "Such dash!"

"Very kind of you, mum." And then to Ivor, as one man to another: "Pleasure to drive a car like this, sir."

Ivor accepted the ownership of the Hawk-Ellis gracefully, merely saying: "Yes, there's no monotony in driving those."

"That's right, sir. Beg pardon, sir, but I seen you play cricket many a time. If they all hit out like you, sir, there'd be no talk of brighter cricket."

Ivor said to Lily Christine: "George Tarlyon's car, isn't it?"

"Yes, he's abroad somewhere and said I could use it as I liked."

"His trust in women will be the death of George yet."

"It's thrilling to drive!"

"Look here, I'd like to try it. What about going to the country—getting some air? No good staying in London in this weather."

"You'll need some gas, sir. Shall I go and fill up?" said the cheerful young man.

"Yes, would you?" Ivor gave him a pound note and the Hawk-Ellis went shooting off down the road, roaring like a film director's idea of a world war. Ivor watched it until it turned the corner.

"Wonder if George would sell that car," he said thoughtfully.

He never saw an expensive car but he wanted to buy it. And he particularly liked fast, wolfish-looking cars. But it was just as well not to say anything. He might forget all about it and buy a new cricket bat instead.

"Go to lunch somewhere in the country, Ivor?"

"Yes. Get some air."

Never was there such a man for "air." He could not sit still and talk for a moment; he must always be walking after a ball or driving a car or riding a horse or watching a race, any kind of a race. If he sat quiet for half an hour he began to look gloomy and say his liver bothered him. His liver liked playing bridge in stuffy clubs, though. It was extraordinary how men's livers seemed to brighten when they were in the company of other men.

"All right, Ivor. I wish the children weren't so far away; we might have gone to see them."

There was something hurried about him, anxious. She stood looking at him thoughtfully.

"Quick, Lily Christine!" he said with an impatient laugh.

"Darling, I've just got home after a long drive!"

But she was thinking that something was up; he was brooding about something. Money?

"Well, I've only got a few hours," he said apologetically, "and if we *are* going for a drive . . ."

"Oh dear, you're not going again to-night!"

Sunday night, alone in London. Suddenly she felt like crying.

"Got to. Playing Lancashire at Old Trafford in the morning."

She turned to go upstairs. What was the use of worrying? Why not take things as they came? It was a grand surprise, his being at home at all.

"I won't be a moment," she said, going up. "I must change, though."

"Right. But buck up."

Yes, he was nervous, hurried. Why? And why had he suddenly come home on a Sunday to see her? Very unlike Ivor.

"Ivor, is anything the matter?" she called down.

She could not see him distinctly, but she knew the way he would quickly jerk his head up, his eyes cold and stern to hide his nervousness, and the tip of his nose quivering.

"Matter? No. Anyhow, I'll tell you in the car. Do buck up now, there's a good girl."

In her room, Hempel said: "We were quite worried about you last night, madam."

"But I told Coghill just as I was going that I mightn't be back! Or perhaps he didn't hear me."

"You know what Coghill is, madam."

Lily Christine sighed. The tiny house was run by her maid Hempel and Ivor's valet Coghill. They had no other servants, Stokes helping when the children were at home. Hempel was willing and devoted, but inefficient. It was Coghill who really ran the house—being also the cook, and a very good cook too. A treasure of a man he was—the surly brute. He never had forgiven his master

for getting married, and he never had forgiven Lily Christine for marrying him. But a treasure he certainly was, and knew it.

When they started off Ivor was much too taken up with enjoying driving a new car to say anything at all. Or he pretended to be much too taken up with it. Yes, he was full of those fumbling subterfuges to evade a point or an issue, and the more he was fumbling inside the sterner and more preoccupied he looked, quite one of Kipling's Englishmen.

There were hundreds of cars, mostly tiny ones, going out of London by Hammersmith, but Ivor nosed in and out and managed very well, considering what a bad driver he really was. He thought he was an uncommonly good one.

“ We're *not* going to Maidenhead ! ” she cried suddenly.

“ Now don't worry, don't worry.”

“ But *I* hate Maidenhead ! ”

“ Then we'll try that Café de Paris place at Bray. Now don't be so highbrow, Lily Christine, and let's have a good lunch.”

“ But why not go to some quiet place ? ”

But it was no use ; he liked a crowd. When he was in a crowd he did not look particularly happy, but somehow he liked to be there. Maybe it gave him a sense of security, of sameness. There was a black, sullen, inchoate pride in him that liked to sit in a crowd, unaware of it, as a labourer will sit in a pub. And he did not like people and places to be different, anything different made him uneasy, jabbed at that sullen, inarticulate thing in him which took a pride in being the same as everyone else. She had always noticed that ordinary people took a queer, hostile pride in being the same as everyone else, while unusual people were much less aggressive about their unusualness.

He drove as though there were a devil in him, fresh-looking and handsome and frank, smiling at policemen just as they were about to pull him up, smiling with that pleasant officer-to-man smile which, so Lily Christine had often thought, had given the under-dogs in England the illusion of happiness for so long. If those attractive-ish Grand Dukes had had the secret of that smile maybe they wouldn't be wandering about Europe now like lean stricken tigers in search of comfortable lairs.

She was jerked out of a fit of musing by something he said. She slipped on her spectacles to look at him. He was staring grimly ahead of him—just as well, as the speedometer was climbing past sixty.

“Slow down, do!” she begged.

He did, but did not turn his thin, stern face to her. Yes, he was hiding. What was he up to now? Why was he hiding? Oh, he *was* such a silly man!

“Look here, dear, anything I say to you now has to be taken in the proper spirit. What I mean is . . .”

“What you mean is, Ivor, that you are going to say something to worry me. Is it money?”

She could see at once that it wasn't money by the flicker across his face.

“Made a packet last week,” he said.

“Ivor, did you really! Oh, please give me some! There's nothing in the house at all.”

“Poke your hand in.” And with his elbow he indicated his inner breast pocket. She fished out a wad of virgin banknotes.

“Millions!” she sighed. “How much can I have, please?”

“Help yourself.”

“Oh, say a number, be business-like! Ivor, how kind of you!”

He grinned. “Well, how much is there?”

There was £240 in £10 notes.

"Well, leave me a hundred," he said.

"No, no, a hundred is quite enough for what I want. Oh Ivor, marvellous! Thank you so much."

"Thank our dumb friends!"

"The horse is the friend of man—yes, indeed!"

"Friend? One and only support of this man."

"I'll write—no, wire—no, telephone—for the children from Esther's place—they've been trespassing on her kindness quite long enough—and take them down to Eastbourne—and give poor Stokes a holiday. Oh Ivor, thank you so much. What a lark, having the children all to oneself—a hundred pounds' worth! Ivor, you *must* manage to come down for a day or two."

"Yes, I'll try," he said shortly.

And she remembered that he wanted to tell her something. She looked furtively at his beautiful profile, but no, it was closed, cold. Oh, why wouldn't he turn to her and frankly yield himself to her friendship instead of trying to bully her sympathy out of her in an underhand way?

She put a hand under his left arm and squeezed it.

"What is it, Ivor?"

She could *see* him thinking behind the set profile. She could have died for him in those moments when she could see the thought inside him trying to get itself clear from all the accumulated rubbish. The old cart-horse. The silly old cart-horse.

"Darling, what's the trouble?"

"Trouble?"

He thought that out. They were on the new magnificent arterial road. There was a car in front, low and heavy, going fast. Ivor seemed to think he could clear his mind by passing it. He passed it, touching seventy-four. Then

he slowed down, and let who liked pass him. The Hawk-Ellis, unaccustomed to being taken down a peg or two by the ordinary trash of the road, growled angrily and stopped dead.

"Fact is," he murmured, "I'm anxious about how you are going to take something I want to ask you."

It wasn't money. Then it must be the other confounded nuisance, love.

"Well, ask me first," she said.

But suddenly she did not feel so gentle towards him. She could not take him and his bothers seriously. Love!

"Suppose . . ." his profile said thoughtfully.

But she did not hear the rest of what he said because of a sudden shock she had. Looking at his set, hidden face, she suddenly saw under the skin of it a ghastly look of self-repulsion. Oh yes, it was there. She had seen the same look on the faces of sick men in high fever. Oh, he must not hate himself so in his inmost being, he must not!

"What was it? I didn't catch," she said.

"Suppose I came to you one day and asked you to divorce me?"

"Oh," she said thoughtfully. "Well . . ." And she broke off, laughing with irritation.

"Just suppose," he said miserably.

"Really, Ivor!" she snapped. "Don't be such a child!"

His features grew more set, sterner. That only meant he simply did not know what to say next, that he was dished.

She laughed again, because she knew that would bewilder him. Really he was too idiotic. She felt like jeering at him, hurting him—the helpless, wanting—"I want some cake, please"—baby!

"If you think," she said bitterly, "I'm going to make

myself wrctched again over some tuppenny-hapenny affair
—well, I'm not!"

"It's not like that," he said quickly, humbly.

And she could not bear that humility that came over him when his soul was quaking before his conscience. Oh, why wasn't he proud, as proud as he looked! If a man had to do wrong he must do wrong in a proud way—not with this shameful time-serving humility. She did not want his hungry, grasping humility.

"Like that!" she echoed sharply. "Then it's like something else equally—"

"It isn't, dear, really it isn't!"

"I wouldn't mind so much," she said helplessly, "if I hadn't to clean up the mess afterward."

For once before he had asked her this same question, when he had fancied himself in love with a girl of eighteen, a doctor's daughter. Oh, what a time that had been! He had flattered the poor girl, as any man of his age and sort so easily could, into falling in love with him. Then her parents found out and very properly forbidden her to see him again. Ivor had been tremendously upset, sentimental to tears over the poor girl's attachment to his worthless person, unable to bear the thought of her misery at the way she was being treated. So he had come to Lily Christine to ask how it would be if she divorced him in a friendly way so that he could do the right thing by the poor little girl. Her name was Louise. Then the three of them—including, of course, Louise—had been miserable for a few weeks, and then Ivor had taken up with a piece of nonsense and Lily Christine had had all the bother of soothing the poor little doctor's daughter, who had attached herself to her as one wronged woman to another. Oh, it had all been a packet of fun! And the doctor's wife also attached herself to her, as an ambitious, climbing woman to someone in "Society." But Lily Christine

knew better now. Oh yes, much better. No more doctor's daughters for her.

"I simply won't," she said, "go through anything like that again. Please understand, Ivor. I will not be dragged into your affairs. If you must have them, have them—but please don't drag me in."

He bit his under lip with his sharp white teeth.

"You fly into the air so!" he muttered. "I was only asking you a question. . . ."

She was tired. How tired she was!

"I'm sorry, dear," she said.

"Suppose," he muttered, "suppose I came to you one day and said I'd met a woman who——"

"Who rode in a circus with one foot on a dachshund and the other on a camel—I'd say good luck to you, only don't tell *me* about it."

He broke out into a low, long chuckle, and she hoped the subject was dropped. She felt so tried and hopeless. Ivor always had an effect on her when he was like this. There he sat, stern and aloof-looking, but all the time he was leaning on her, weighing her down, pressing on her.

"But seriously," he said.

No, she was not to be let off.

"So," she sighed, "you are really in love again!"

He was dumb, staring grimly ahead. He would not be made a mock of.

"A Louise, Ivor, or just a piece of nonsense?"

"Neither," he snapped.

They sank into silence. Her mind was quite blank; she could not think of anything, she was too tired.

"If you want to know," he said savagely, "I've never been like this before."

She did not care what he was like; it did not interest her.

"Never," he said.

"Like what, Ivor?"

He suddenly flushed crimson.

"Obsessed," he said, ashamed of the word.

It was so simple, so childish. He had probably, for a change, met some nice woman who had not let him make love to her. So he had become more and more sentimental about her—he called that being "obsessed"—and had finally hit on the brilliant idea of asking her if, should he be free, she would marry him. The fact was that when he was "obsessed" he did not know what he was doing and relied on Lily Christine to tell him.

"Have you actually popped her the question yet, Ivor?"

"No, I haven't," he snapped.

The conversation had taken a twist he could not cope with. To his mind, Lily Christine had a streak of flippant bad taste in her which always nonplussed him.

"I don't even know," he said sulkily, "how she would take it if I did."

"Well, if she is a nice woman, as you say, it might occur to her to give your wife and children a passing thought."

"That's just the point!" he said, brightening up, as though he had been waiting for her to say just that.

"You see, Lily Christine," he said solemnly, "she is a very good woman."

It was no good laughing at him. He never would have the faintest idea how ridiculous he was sometimes.

"Yes, dear," she said.

"Not, you know, modern—not at all that sort—in fact, very respectable."

"In fact, rather like me."

"Yes," he said doubtfully. "But more—you know—conventional in manner. And she has got a position to keep up, too."

"Married, Ivor?"

"Widow."

And that seemed to set him thinking deeply. Widow.

She simply did not dare to laugh, he would have been so hurt. He was plunged in thoughtful gloom about the poor unprotected woman who was a widow and had a position to keep up. There he sat, stern and aloof-looking, the conquering hero, and all the while he was helplessly bothered inside.

"Then, I suppose," she said gently, "as she is so proper, she has sent you about your business?"

He nodded dumbly, staring straight ahead of him. They were drawn up now at the side of the wide arterial road.

"Won't she let you see her at all, Ivor?" She really did feel for him then. How wrctched the silly old man must be.

"She said," he muttered, "that she'd have no hand in breaking up a home."

Lily Christine could not resist saying: "Very proper, darling."

He flushed again. There she was, mocking . . .

"So I told her," he said savagely, "that she wasn't breaking up anything."

She sat very still. She was shocked into complete stillness, blankness.

"Oh, I see," she said.

She stared at him, unbelieving. But he did not look at her. He was afraid. How afraid he was, with that sticky hungry fear of being left alone to cope with a difficulty.

Ivor who had never let his wife be put upon, who had always kept his pieces of nonsense definitely in their places where his wife was concerned, who had never belittled her . . . And so the final rot had at last set in, his last remnant of behaviour had crumbled.

She had failed to hold him in love. Now, she had failed to hold him in friendship.

"Well, you know best," she said.

An extraordinary misery came out of him. She could feel it, weighing her down. Oh, but she would not have it! She would not always be tugged after him into his hollow miseries.

"I couldn't help it," he said bitterly.

"Of course not, dear. Let's go on to lunch, shall we?"

"She said she couldn't see me again," he said quickly. "Said it wasn't right. And I simply can't face not seeing her again—I tell you, I can't!"

And he waited as though for her to say something. But she was dumb, empty.

"So I told her," he went on hopelessly, "that she wasn't injuring you in any way—that you didn't love me and had your own life."

The tricks! The beastly crawling tricks he could stoop to when he *had* to get something. And the unbearable-ness of it seemed to empty her of all humanity, to leave her stark and frozen in a wilderness of disgust.

"I don't want to hear any more, please, Ivor. Let's go on."

But he had no vision of his own; only his crawling misery shoved him on. There he sat, never once daring to look at her, but all the time blindly hitting out at her with his misery.

Oh, she could not bear it. There he sat, putting all the burden of his inner self-repulsion on to her. She could not bear it. She wanted to cry out.

"And why have you told me all this?" she said bitterly. "What's the use?"

For the first time he turned his eyes to her—those staring blue-lit eyes that had in them a look of bewildered expectancy. And they seemed to be searching inside her with an agonized hopeless expectancy.

"If you think I don't know what a brute I'm being," he muttered.

No, she could not hold out against him ; she never could. Always he got her, pulling her back to him with his fear. For that was all it was, that was all his "love" was, fear. She had often thought that for most people, most men, there was no such thing as love—there was only the fear of being alone. But she was not like that—she was conscious of her aloneness, of her separateness. And this aloneness needed love in spite of herself, in spite of all she could do, in spite of her reason. It needed love to be always draining it of its separate and inviolable strength. So they were forever driven together, he by fear and she by that numbing, mechanical process of self-robbery and self-violation known as "love." So he was forever being pushed to her by his bewildered, blundering sense of her necessity to him, and she was always unable to stop something in her from reaching out to protect him, even when he was hurting her unbearably.

He said : "Lily Christine, suppose I don't get over this—and suppose she likes me and I come to you and—"

"Of course," she said wearily. "You must trust me more, Ivor. Of course I shall divorce you whenever you really want me to."

His blue eyes were blurred with thick, childish tears.

"You are a wonder, Lily Christine ! "

"Oh yes, aren't I ! Now what about some lunch ? "

"But I haven't told you who she is yet ! It's——"

"No, Ivor ! "

It was the beginning of a hysterical scream. She bit it down, flushing crimson.

"I don't want to hear who it is," she said icily. And

she felt she was going to blubber, and made a frantic effort not to.

“Oh, as you like ! ” said Ivor, offended.

“Well, aren’t I right ! ” she cried at him savagely, the bitter tears choking her. And she took his hand from the steering wheel and began playing with it on her lap, opening the fingers and then closing them.

“Right ? ” he said stupidly, uncertain whether she was laughing or crying. “How d’you mean, right ? ”

“Why, once I let you begin telling me about her, the next thing I know you will be asking me to go to her and ask her to marry you ! ”

And they began laughing helplessly, both of them almost in tears.

But he never did tell her by name who this lady of his heart was. She could not help it being thrust at her quite soon enough.

CHAPTER VI

MRS. HARVEY liked Lily Christine every bit as much as she thought she would. Lily Christine wrote her a very nice bread-and-butter letter thanking her for her husband's hospitality to a lady in distress and asking her to come and see her when she was back in London. But it was almost October before Muriel could bring herself to embark on such an adventure, and by that time Harvey himself had seen quite a deal of Lily Christine. Indeed, he was become quite a friend of the house.

Yes, Muriel liked Lily Christine, but . . . well, such people bothered her. She was not comfortable with them, those young girls and women with long silly legs and impudent knees and dabs of paint, just dabs of it stuck on their lovely white skins. The way they made up, even girls who couldn't be more than nineteen !

They were nice, yes, and Lily Christine was a darling, yes, but Muriel felt lost among them. They were too casual for her—in their manners, their conversation, the way they sat about all anyhow. Their swearing shocked her too—although she could see they didn't swear with the idea of being shocking ; it came quite natural to them. They didn't stop at "damn," and not always at "bloody." And also she felt more than usually dowdy when she was with them, but she did not say that to Harvey.

But the point was, that, while she felt dowdy in her person, in every other way—mentally, domestically, matrimonially—she felt quite impatiently well ordered as compared with those muddled young people. And

they made her feel old too, and glad to be old. While as for Lily Christine's tiny house, Muriel could not help feeling that it needed—not cleaning, for it looked clean enough—but a good slapping.

So far as Harvey himself was concerned, his feelings about his new friend were as dull and plain as everything else about him. *For one thing, she was quite a new experience for him, and for another, he valued her as a person and he valued very highly the friendliness which she did him the honour to show him.* He could not help seeing that the reason for that lay in his own ordinariness, that he filled in her life a place similar, but of course on a much lower plane, to that filled by Neville Parwen, that she had a need for quiet, steady, grown-up, talkative short, boring—friendships.

He hadn't, of course, been able to help gathering that her life was a rather difficult one, that she was left very much to herself in the managing of it, that Summerest was not an ideal husband. Yet she had a way of living that life so naturally that his admiration went out to her.

Now the idea of anyone living his or her life "bravely" under difficulties is, to tell the truth, slightly embarrassing—"putting-off," the phrase is. But Lily Christine did not do that at all; there were not any "braveries" about her of the sort that made a man want to turn away his head and shed a quiet tear of sympathy.

All she did was to live in the most natural way in the world, neither hiding her difficulties nor stressing them, which is to say that she made everyone about her quite comfortable. She had a regard for friendship, would not inflict herself on her friends. One of the first things Harvey noticed in her was an almost exaggerated respect for friendship, a charming tentativeness in all her intimacies, which was not due to any ungenerous uncertainty about her friends, but to an instinctively lofty faith

in the spiritual worth of friendships. She could not make *use* of friendship for the very reason that friendship was there to be made use of. And this, since the world is a place where conveniences of all kinds are much sought after, made her the under-dog in her friendships, for whereas she could not make use of her friends they, alas, could only too easily make use of her.

The Summerests lived in one of those small narrow houses in one of those quiet streets of small narrow houses that litter the neighbourhoods of the great squares of London. Muriel fancied that such houses must have been built in a bad-tempered hurry by an unhappily married architect who wanted the people who lived in them to get on each other's nerves in the shortest possible time. Not for anything would she have lived in a house like Lily Christine's even for five minutes. It was "central" enough, certainly, but who wanted to be "central" if one's life had no centre?

For what struck her most about that house was that it was not a home but just any sort of place through which two people happened to be passing.

"Those two people," she said to Harvey, "aren't really living in that house; they are camping. What a pity it is they don't settle down! But it's even more of a pity if they *think* they are settled down. There can't be any permanence in a life like that."

And Muriel was quite angry about that impermanence, thinking what a pity it was that such handsome, healthy young people did not give themselves a chance. They were too casual, that was the point.

Harvey found that Lily Christine felt quite as strongly about the tiny house not being a home, but that Summerest would not live anywhere but in a "central" situation. But Harvey never got much further in his knowledge of the house than that it was a poky place, for the only room

he ever really got to know in it was Lily Christine's bedroom, which sounds singular but can be very plausibly explained.

The front door was opened to callers by a man called Coghill, with whom Harvey never managed to establish friendly relations. But he gathered that this Coghill had a weight or weights on his mind, being cook, butler, and valet in one. If Coghill did not know the caller he said, "Wait, will you," just like that, and left the visitor in a tiny sitting-room off the dark, narrow hall. It had a forlorn, unused air, that little sitting-room.

All Harvey remembered about it, as he saw it only once or twice, was a large leather-framed photograph of Summerest standing on what must have been a gramophone. The frame was curiously at odds with the photograph, for Summerest was in the dress uniform of some Guards regiment, and very grand he looked, staring right at the poor devil Coghill shoved into that room as though to say: "Yes, this is my house, funny though it may seem, and it does not interest me if you like it or not." Lily Christine said that the photograph was there to intimidate gentlemen who came for money, but that all it had ever done so far had been to intimidate a man who wanted his bill paid into taking the silver frame, so now they had put it into a cheap leather one.

If Coghill knew the visitor, all he said was, "Upstairs," and up the narrow stairs you went to Lily Christine's bedroom. For that was the only comfortable "lived-in" room in the house, and it did all the honours of the house with an easy, agreeable hospitality.

Harvey—who, being a journalist, never saw what was under his nose—did not realize it was a bedroom until, through a half-open door, he saw what must be the adjoining bathroom. The bathroom was quite spacious—"Money has been spent on it," sighed Lily Christine—

and she would dress in there while her friends sat about in the bedroom.

Apart from Coghill, Harvey saw only one other servant, Lily Christine's maid Hempel, who had an unpleasant way of imitating her mistress's voice on the telephone and then putting you in your place when you naturally addressed her as Lily Christine. "I will call madam," she would say icily. Apart from that, however, she appeared to be a kindly, agreeable woman, willing but bewildered. Lily Christine said she didn't know *what* she would do if she hadn't Hempel to look after.

Harvey usually left Fleet Street a little before six o'clock and reached his home near the Kensington High Street just in time to say good night to John and James. But nowadays, urged on by Muriel, who was never tired of saying he ought to "go out more," he would now and again ascend to the upper air at the Hyde Park Corner station and walk the few hundred yards to Lily Christine's house.

As a rule there would be a car or two outside the tiny house, maybe quite a queue of lean and deadly looking cars, "sports" cars they were called, a Sunbeam, a Bugatti, a Bentley, a Vauxhall, and the like, for at that hour there would be always one or two young people in Lily Christine's bedroom. She appeared to be at the mercy of a quantity of cousins, or if they were not cousins they were young people who much preferred her to their own cousins; crisply casual youths in grey flannel trousers and dazzling maidens with high, unrestrained voices. Curiously enough, these young people did not embarrass Harvey so much as he had expected, but no doubt that had something to do with the atmosphere of Lily Christine's bedroom, which was not at all embarrassing.

These pretty girls and pleasant young men were apparently all about to be married to one another or were

just married to another ; anyhow, they were in trouble of one kind or another, and not one of them appeared to be able to embark on anything whatsoever without Lily Christine's advice or help. They never ceased to worry her with their affairs. Harvey gathered that Lily Christine held a very high place in the estimation of mothers and fathers generally, and that what she said " went " with suspicious parents who did not want their children to make themselves conspicuous at night clubs and the like. So Lily Christine was shamelessly used by these young people for one thing after another, she was always being asked to wangle this or sidetrack that.

But they never became quite definite to Harvey, as he no doubt never became quite definite to them. He fancied they thought of him in an amiable, non-committal way as " that writer fellow," and that they no doubt admired him in an amiable, non-committal way for the brains he presumably had with which to be a " writer fellow."

Neville Parwen, of course, was the exception. With him, Harvey instantly established a sympathetic alliance. It was not until he had met Parwen five or six times that he caught his name and of course instantly connected him with some admirable books he had read. After that they always had a great deal to talk about, for Harvey had pegged away in his time too, and had published a couple. And, like all honest men, there was nothing he enjoyed so much as talking " shop."

Another of Harvey's prejudices about the Sort of Life Young People Lead Nowadays was shattered at finding that there was no such thing as a cocktail shaker in the house. This was also a great blow to Muriel, who said she did not know what novelists and bishops were coming to, the way they misled honest folk with their lies and misstatements. In point of fact, Harvey began to feel quite a

dissipated fellow, for he always enjoyed a whisky and soda or so at about six o'clock, and not a young man there ever took more than one, if that. He gathered that Summerest, like John Wilkes, had no small vices, while as for Lily Christine, she was always trying to put on weight and said she found a nice glass of stout very sympathetic, but that Coghill was such a selfish beast he either did not order any or drank it all downstairs.

Presently the young people he met there began to puzzle him. For instance, devoted though they were to Lily Christine, they did not even in manner take sides in the Summerest difficulties. It certainly looked as though they were trying in there muddled way to shield Lily Christine somehow ; it certainly looked as though they wanted to fill up her life as much as possible so that she should not feel lonely. But what Harvey could not understand was that they made no bones about showing that they liked Summerest very much.

Were these young people just muddle-headed or were they extraordinarily fair-minded ? The relations between Summerest and Lily Christine were neither hushed up nor rubbed in. It was accepted, comically enough, that she was at his beck and call whenever he wanted her, but that he was silly ass enough not to want her very often. They did not even begin to condemn Summerest because he could not keep a home going decently or because he neglected their adored Lily Christine for some of the cheapest women in London.

It was Muriel who pointed out to him that the trouble with these young people was that they had no standards. It was extraordinary that they hadn't, since they had all been brought up at schools where—so a woman was given to understand—good form was the standard. But they had simply dropped that : they had no standard. To them a man was not bad or good ; he was amusing or a bore. He

might be caught cheating at cards, but if he was someone these young people were in the habit of seeing and who made them laugh, they met their elders' condemnation of him by an apologetic murmuring to the effect that they knew he was a cad but that it was devilish hard to refuse to lunch or dine with a fellow who amused one.

Muriel traced the whole trouble to that word "amusing," and Harvey wasn't sure that he did not agree with her. On several occasions at Lily Christine's he had heard them talking of a highly connected young man who had apparently been up to all sorts of unpleasant mischief, from rape and issuing dud cheques to selling a pearl rope belonging to a mistress of his who did not dare to prosecute for fear of the consequent scandal. And although Lily Christine and Parwen raised their voices against the man, saying he must *not* be encouraged or countenanced any longer, the young girls present said he must be very attractive if it was true that he had such a success with beautiful women, while the young men—those essentially "right"-looking young men—muttered apologetically that he was uncommonly amusing and that he had never done *them* any harm so why should they cease to know him, particularly as amusing fellows were so rare?

Harvey found this laxity of judgment absolutely bewildering, particularly as these young people were such good types of their class. Maybe he exaggerated it, but it made him uneasy about his children, about England.

"Unless," he said to Parwen, "we get back to some hard-and-fast standards, we shall soon be breeding a race of amusing cads."

Parwen smiled wryly. "We won't," he said, "if by 'we' you mean the England that matters at all. But

this particular class happens to be very busy committing suicide. I think it's a pity, as I happen to belong to it, but I don't suppose it matters in the long run if this particular kind of 'upper' class goes or not. There will always be a governing class of some kind, and it will always go rotten as it begins to be useless."

Summerest was very seldom there at the hour Harvey called, but he would come in for a short while now and then. Harvey had expected to find Summerest more or less as he had known him at school, for he fancied that men of that sort did not usually change very much.

But Summerest had grown from a slim, athletic young giant who always had a smile for everyone into a heavily built, clumsy-looking man who seemed to be very much taken up with his own thoughts. The man's head bothered Harvey ; it was smallish and fine and *selective* looking, quite at variance with the slow-moving, clumsy body. And there was a settled, brooding unawareness at the back of those frozen blue eyes that went a good way to unsettling Harvey's precious theories about him. What it came to was that he simply could not make up his mind to dislike the man and be done with it.

Anyone could see that Summerest was not a happy man. In spite of everything he did when he came into the room, his idle chatterings with the young people, his slow-moving easy humour, Harvey could not help fancying that he was a man living behind a curtain, that his thoughts were leading him a devil of a life. If ever a man was bound to himself by chains, it was Summerest, and he did not know how to free himself but kept on helplessly twisting himself this way and that.

That was the impression he gave Harvey, and an indigestible sort of impression it was. He did not want to like Summerest and he did not want to be sorry for Summerest, but there was no denying the fact that lie

was finding unsuspected difficulties in the way of disliking Summerest.

All the same, he could not help rebelling, on Lily Christine's behalf, against what he fancied to be the resignation of her attitude. After all, she was still so young, she had such qualities of mind and heart, so much to give, and was she to waste all that on a vagabond kind of man who did not know the value of what he held ?

But always behind everything she did or said seemed to flow a queerly quiescent love for that clumsy-looking, handsome incompetent husband of hers. And who knew whether or not she was being very wise ? For she seemed to be managing very well, much better than those unhappy women who have a "proper pride" and know "what is due to them." She seemed to have come to terms with life, to be quite happy.

And then one night Harvey saw her crying, or as near crying as made no difference. This news, when he carried it to his wife, for she walked step by step with him in the course of his friendship with Lily Christine, disturbed the absurd pair very much.

"Oh dear," Muriel said, "the poor child is beginning to be sorry for herself ! She must have fought so hard against that until now, but the temptation has been too strong for her and now there will be nothing the wretched man can do, bad or good, which won't give her something to be unhappy about."

CHAPTER VII

THIS happened on the only occasion he ever dined with Lily Christine and her friends, his friendship with her and acquaintance with them being almost exclusively a bedroom one. Muriel was having her mother to dinner that night, and on such occasions Harvey would try to keep out of the way, for the old lady was a martyr to novel-writing and was always at him to get her "puffs" in the newspapers.

At first, not wishing to trespass on anyone's hospitality, he was for declining Lily Christine's last minute invitation to join her and some young friends for dinner, but she very easily overcame that difficulty by telling him that he would have to pay for his own. She was chaperoning two very young engaged couples to dinner at a place in Bond Street, and as the two young men would have just enough to pay for themselves and their girls, she and Harvey, the two grown ups, would each pay for themselves.

They dined late, at about the hour when Harvey and his wife had usually finished dinner and were beginning to yawn. The place was crammed with people, many of them smiling across at Lily Christine and her friends. Harvey hoped they would take him for a distinguished literary figure, but feared from the way their glances smoothly passed over him they had already rated him as a dentist being taken out for a treat.

Where did all the money come from? he wondered. For years now one had been hearing how poor these people were, how they were overtaxed, how they could

not live as they used, how they were being deprived almost of the necessities of life—but here they were, hundreds of them crammed into one room, and all apparently with money to burn.

He was not poor himself, he earned a good wage by the sweat of his brow, but he could not afford to bring Muriel to this place regularly once a week. To do so he would have to do without other more essential things. But here all these people were, and one gathered pretty regularly here, dining without an anxious thought at two to four pounds a head. Of course, these well-set-up young men were all working at one job or another, but only very few of them could be earning enough to live on this scale as the fancy took them. Then where did all the money come from?

It disturbed one a little to think that the fathers of these young people quite easily “faced the necessity for the fact that in the present state of industrial depression the wage earners must learn not too ask too much.” One had recently been reading in the papers of a miner’s family, the parents and brothers and sisters of a poor devil who had escaped from the French Foreign Legion, who were “managing” on twenty-three shillings a week. Harvey couldn’t help feeling that there was, by some fluke, extraordinarily good statecraft on having only foreign waiters in these places. A few Englishmen from the industrial districts who had taken to waitering for a living would undoubtedly break the sleek heads of a few diners just for the satisfaction of the thing. It was an amusing thought, that revolution would never break out in England until Englishmen could be servile enough to take to waitering in large numbers.

Lily Christine’s way of acknowledging her friends was funny to watch. When someone smiled at her she either took no notice at all or stared blankly back until Harvey

or someone nudged her, when she would gasp, "Where ? Who ?" slip on her spectacles, and smiled brightly toward a particular spot in the crowded room. Harvey calculated that it was only once in fifty times she managed to return a smile in the direction whence it had come, while for the rest she bestowed her favours indiscriminately on people who stared back in blank astonishment. He fancied that lorgnettes would save her a lot of trouble, and she said she had several but that she always forgot to bring one out, and that anyhow she felt she did not carry off lorgnettes very well ; maybe she was not stand-offish enough in type.

"But don't people sometimes get offended, thinking you are 'cutting' them ?"

"Oh yes, but there are complications in everything, aren't there ? People love complicating things. But do you think short-sightedness can be passed on from parents to children ? Now please think carefully before you answer, for a lot hangs on a question like that."

But all he could think of in that connection were photographs he had seen long ago of stout bespectacled Germans surrounded by stout bespectacled children. However, the Germans were an odd race to whom odd things seemed to happen, and so he gave Lily Christine encouragement on the ground that she was not a stout German.

How queer it always seemed to him, queer with that odd, profound, unreasonable queerness one found in books so widely different as those of Walter de la Mare and Norman Douglas, that those clear eyes that sometimes changed from violet to blue-grey even while you looked at them, those "mermaid's eyes" that sometimes seemed to be living a far-away, limitless life so very different from the life she actually was living—that they were weak and helpless.

Once she had told him that when she was a girl several young men had fancied themselves in love with her for no other reason she could see than that she wore spectacles. He had sympathized with the rejected young men. A pretty girl with that "appealing" shortcoming was a devilish pitfall for the sentimental side of a man. Whereas if she had not been pretty . . . well, it was a funny world.

"I'm sometimes worried about Timothy's eyes," she was saying. "Wouldn't it be awful if they turned out not to be everything a chap's eyes should be?"

"But you don't want him to be a 'chap,' do you?"

"I didn't mean socially, but athletically. Imagine how furious Ivor would be if his son and heir couldn't Keep His Eye On The Ball without spectacles! Oh dear, oh dear!"

But young Timothy's eyes on the contrary, had struck Harvey as being anything but weak. Timothy, at the age of two and a half, appeared to be gifted with very sharp eyesight indeed for anything he wanted. Harvey began laughing and Lily Christine flushing as they recalled a new game of Timothy's, invented and patented and insisted on by him against all comers; and what an embarrassing game it was, for now Timothy was no sooner brought downstairs to make himself agreeable to his mother's friends than he gravely made a lurch for and insisted on pulling at the more important buttons of any man present.

"But it's not about his eyes I'm really worried," Lily Christine said. "I'm worried about what is going to happen to Timothy before he is twenty. Apparently he is to be taken out of my hands years and years before then and his character formed for him in the Usual Way. Now do I trust that Usual Way to produce a sound, reasonable Timothy at the age of twenty? Do I? Well, I don't know that I do."

In fact, the public schools were a cause of doubt and worry to Lily Christine, as they are beginning to be to every young mother who has educated herself out of the complacent class ignorance of previous generations of mothers. Lily Christine *wanted* to respect the public school idea as her mother had before her, but doubt would creep in, a dim but very uncomfortable doubt.

She wanted Timothy to grow up into a fair-minded, reasonable human being and to understand the possibilities of a fair-minded, reasonable human being. It was not much to want for a boy, she thought, considering the grand things other mothers wanted for theirs. It was not much—but could the Usual Way, the public schools and universities give that much? Did they turn out fair-minded, reasonable human beings? Well, the answer was all around her, and she was not at all sure that the answer was “yes.”

She knew any amount of men who believed in “team work” and “pulling together” and “playing the game,” who not only believed but practised, and she hoped Timothy would be like them in those things. But wasn’t there something more? wasn’t it possible to have a more adequate adjustment of those qualities to the life around them? The point was, that not one of the ordinarily decent men she knew, the men who after all were born with the “advantages” of life, had any sense of responsibility to the life that had *given* them these advantages; they were enclosed in the immediate present by an amiable but quite decided rejection of anything it did not suit their comfort to believe, they were absolutely without any workmanlike qualities of mind with which to digest the teeming ideas around them, they good-naturedly disowned any responsibility whatsoevcr for the future.

“Well, said Harvey, “the very worst that can happen

to a boy of Timothy's upbringing is that he will think only of enjoying himself."

And he was thinking of Timothy's father.

"Yes," Lily Christine said thoughtfully. "But one must fight against that."

"Your main difficulty will be that examples will always be before him."

And he was thinking of Timothy's father.

"We'll see," she said, smiling suddenly. "I'll do my damnedest, anyhow. It's no fate for a boy—to grow up from a fag to a prefect—and then stop!"

"Like his father?"

"Not quite," she said slowly. "Ivor has got a subtle thinking devil somewhere in him. That's what makes him unaccountable and—and—"

"And attractive?"

"Yes," she said.

Meanwhile the two young couples had not ceased dancing, but Lily Christine had begged Harvey not to ask her to dance as she was not in the mood. The small floor was crammed with people dancing, the men with glum looks which would have called out one's sympathy if one hadn't known they were enjoying themselves enormously. On the whole, though, they seemed to be dancing very well; that is to say they did not look as though they were dancing but as though they were dying, and dying slowly, very slowly, too slowly.

Harvey thought the girls were very pretty and decorative, with their long, irresponsible legs and their bright dresses. Fine, strapping girls most of them were, too, dancing with men half their size, so that one wondered what girls were coming too, where was their sense of fair-play, where was their chivalry?

Seriously, though, it was surprising how tall the girls were, tall and soldierly when they weren't tall and limp.

But the limp ones were the more numerous, looking as though they would fall if they weren't held up by the glum-looking little men, looking as though they already had fallen in the streets and been run over and returned from the hospitals as useless for vivisection.

But what surprised Harvey was that, with the ever-present testimony of the mirrors round the walls, the mothers and aunts and grandmothers did not see how silly, how gruesome, they looked dancing in their gay colours. Gruesome—how gruesome they were, with their vitality for “enjoyment” unimpaired, travestying youth, degrading dignity—the silly, gruesome, elderly people dancing in a nightmare of an unreal world where they really thought it mattered *what* they looked like in the costly dresses that jeered at their painted checks and flaccid bodies and dim but hungry eyes. He was glad indeed that his mother lived contentedly in the country and was not a gay young thing in the watches of the night.

But all things must have an end, so presently he turned to Lily Christine to ask, would she think it rude of him if he were to set about going home?

She seemed to be absorbed in playing with a burnt match on the white cloth. Her head was bent, her whole being seemed to be absorbed in the fingers with which she was making silly, idle strokes of a dirty brown colour on the white cloth.

Somehow there was something sad in the look of her bent head, the boyish nape and the short, dark, curly hair. Why sad, he could not define to himself, but in that moment that was what he felt, and also he felt that something in her drooping absorption was calling to his friendship. But, alas, what an unavailing friend friendship is, for what can one ever really do to help another? what can friendship achieve to justify our lofty belief in the friendship *we* have to offer?

"It's time," he tentatively said, "for a working man to be going home."

At first he thought she was so absorbed in her silly game with her burnt match that she had not heard. But then she looked round at him very quickly and away again.

"Yes?" she murmured.

Quick she had been with her look, but not quick enough, for when she had turned away again to her game with the burnt match he had a picture in his head of two eyes alight with tears. He lit a cigarette and sat silent.

About a quarter of an hour before he had seen Summerest come in with two women, but he had taken no particular notice. Now his eyes searched for him and his companions, to find them at last in a corner a good way from them.

The fellow was talking earnestly to a lovely fair woman, and a very good-looking pair they made. He had never heard Summerest say much and could not help wondering what he was finding to say with such earnestness to his lovely companion. As for the other woman, who had looks of a kind herself but was quite put in the shade by the beauty, she sat taking a very bright interest in everything that was going on except at her own table. She was quite pitifully the "third," poor woman.

Of course Harvey had instantly recognized the lovely fair woman, for he would have been a hermit indeed who did not know the face of Mrs. Abbey the actress, long acknowledged to be the most beautiful Englishwoman of her time, Harvey admired her, but, what is more, his wife admired her very much, and as a rule they would make a point of going to see her in whatever play she was appearing.

Mrs. Abbey was a very beautiful woman in a radiant

LILY CHRISTINE

compelling way, but that alone would not have won for her a following so enormous and so devoted that no play in which she was billed was ever anything but a great success. Where Mrs. Abbey scored over other beautiful women was in the profound sympathy she called out of ordinary people. She gave ordinary people such a convincing impression of being unspoilt and kind and good.

Serious critics were agreed that she was a great actress, but complained that of late years she had done herself and her genius less than justice in her choice of plays. Mrs. Abbey had first attracted critical attention and made a very great reputation in serious plays at the smaller theatres, and her interpretations of Shakespearean and Scandinavian, and Russian parts were never to be forgotten by true lovers of the theatre. Apparently, however, she had found that, in fairness to herself, she must concede to the popular fancy in the choice of her plays, and of late years she had played in a series of polite comedies and melodramas by popular authors. Her following was enormous. But it was not for her acting that the people flocked to see Mrs. Abbey, they went because they admired and loved her.

Harvey had always felt that it was right and proper that Mrs. Abbey should be the most popular figure on the stage, perhaps the most popular woman in the public eye. He felt it was a popularity that was highly creditable to the people at large, it was an essentially English popularity apart from the other varieties that made a great hullabaloo about wit and glitter and sex-profoundities.

Mrs. Abbey was a woman who behaved herself with a sense of her responsibility to her position, and so she was an example to the people. She flattered the Englishness of the public not only by her glorious fair beauty, which never was spoken of but as "typically English,"

but also by her way of life, for in her private life Mrs. Abbey stood for everything that was womanly and good and sensible. And the fact that she steadfastly refused to shingle her golden hair delighted "sound" people, too. When her only son had died of pneumonia a few years ago there had been unparalleled scenes of popular sympathy. Her husband had been killed in the last year of the war.

Lily Christine, jabbing at the tablecloth, broke her overworked match. But she did not look round at Harvey. He was relieved, for he did not want to meet those distressed eyes. So at last she was showing her pain, at last the long suffering was wearing down.

Then she surprised him by seeming to know his thoughts, for she suddenly said :

"Now you wouldn't call *her* a piece of nonsense, would you?"

"Mrs. Abbey?" He was surprised into a thoughtless vehemence. "Good Lord, no!"

She looked at him, then. She was smiling, that was a good thing. But what an unknowableness there was in those deep sea-lit eyes! What was she really doing, really thinking, in the far-away, limitless place where she could have no companion?

But she was smiling, too.

"I suppose you think, Mr. Rupert Harvey, that I'm jealous?"

"I shouldn't blame you if you were—angry!"

For a while she seemed to be considering something very seriously. The shadows of deep, deep places seemed to darken the mermaid's eyes. But she was smiling, too.

"All the same, it *is* hard," she said. "Here I get used to his being partial to fancy ladies and pieces of nonsense—and then he rounds on me by coming out with the Albert Memorial—for though she is much more beautiful,

she is just as respectable, isn't she? You'll admit he is a *most* surprising man . . . ”

He could see she was talking to distract herself, not heeding what she was saying.

“ I wonder who the other woman is,” he said, to keep the ball rolling.

“ Faney, you don't know that! ”

“ Is she a poor relation of Mrs. Abbey's? ”

“ All I know about her is that Mrs. Abbey is never seen out alone with a man after midnight and always has someone like that with her.”

He glanced again through the crowd at the far corner table. Summerest was still talking, while Mrs. Abbey was eating—not just pecking at her food, but really eating as though she had wanted her supper. There was a faint smile on her lovely fair face while she ate. One could see that Summerest was talking to amuse, and that he was succeeding. All the same, Harvey could not help fancying that there was a gloom over him, something hopeless about him.

“ He certainly seems to have plenty to say to her,” he couldn't help remarking.

Lily Christine had put her glasses on and was looking about the room. At his remark she turned to him, and her eyes behind her glasses were so shy, so timid, that he wondered fearfully what he had said.

“ That's just the point,” she said, laughing nervously.

“ The point, Lily Christine? ”

“ You see,” she said nervously, “ you would never believe it, but that isn't Ivor talking—but me! ”

And as he did not understand the riddle at all, she tried to give him the key, confused and flushing, for she had been led into the temptation of talking of herself.

The irony of things was what had suddenly stabbed at her, pierced her defences. And he began to see how

helpless it made a woman to be gradually forced to realize the irony of what is happening to her, to be forced to realize how consummately life is *using* her, with what merciless art life is exploiting such poor qualities as she has, not for her good but to her hurt. Yes, he could see her now clearly enough sitting at Summerest's table, a sad and self-mocking phantom, prompting him, giving him amusing terms of speech, points of view, more or less civilized arguments—adding to his physical attractions just the necessary bits of intelligent background without which he could not amuse or interest a Mrs. Abbey.

There she was, a self-mocking but conscientious phantom, standing at her husband's shoulder and helping him to cut a figure in a serious woman's eyes. Summerest had never read much, had never had but a lazy, inarticulate point of view, while for years she had been talking to him about everything from politics and books to nursery rhymes. Nonsense it all was, of course, for what brains had she? but still she had talked on in her own way, while he, with that slow, spidery power of assimilation which some blundering men have, had taken it all in.

"It is hard," she said, "but at the same time it's laughable. And the hardest part of all, and also the most laughable, is that . . . well, that Ivor has nothing to say to me in a general way because—well, I've already said to him anything he's got to say—whereas he naturally likes being with some other woman with whom he's not tongue-tied by the knowledge that she has at one time or another given him the point of view that's making his conversation. I wonder if it happens to many a woman—to start off eagerly to amuse her husband, to make him laugh and interest him—and then gradually find out that the poor man is being made to feel small to himself by her pathetic little talents—from which the next step

follows naturally, his feeling much more comfortable with a woman whom *he* can amuse and interest in the way he has learnt from his wife." She suddenly added : " Do you know her at all ? "

" Mrs. Abbey ? " No, lie had never met her, but he knew enough about the lady, he teased Lily Christine, to be able to assure her that her husband was in very safe keeping with her, that he could come to no harm with Mrs. Abbey.

" Oh yes, I know ! Poor Ivor. I know her a little—we've had stalls together at Charity Bazaars—that kind of ' knowing.' But I like her very much indeed. She is straightforward and serious—you know, in the French sense. One has, right away, confidence in her—she's kind and sympathetic. But I heard something—well, odd—about her the other day. At least, it seemed to me odd. Do you know a Greek called Ambatriadi ? "

Now Harvey did not know a Greek called Ambatriadi and, what is more, found himself viewing Mr. Ambatriadi with prejudice.

" So he told you something ' odd ' about Mrs. Abbey, did he ? "

" No, not that—he was merely—well, giving an opinion about her."

Harvey to his surprise, found himself resenting the idea of any foreigner giving any " odd " opinion whatsoever about a first-rate Englishwoman like Mrs. Abbey. He had never had any reason to define his admiration of her to himself, but now he began to realize that it was a very particular admiration, rooted deep in him.

Lily Christine laughed at him, made fun of him.

" No, he is not a bit what you think, but very kind and agreeable. We all like our Ambatriadi very much, and you will, too, when you meet him. And he didn't say anything against Mrs. Abbey ; on the contrary, he admires

her as much as we all do. It was only that he happened to choose a curious word in describing her—he said she was ‘crafty.’”

“Well!” snapped Harvey. “The old *perfide Albion*, I suppose. Of all the silly words that might be used by jealous people about Mrs. Abbey that must be about the silliest. Crafty!”

But he could not help indignantly thinking that there was something more than merely silly in such a perverted description—there was something rotten, musty. Crafty! It took him quite a few moments to “get over” that word in such a connection. And, in spite of what Lily Christine said, he felt he would never have a really warm feeling for Mr. Ambatriadi.

Lily Christine was laughing at him, teasing him.

“Anyone would think your best girl had been insulted!” He laughed at himself, too, rather ruefully.

“All the same, Lily Christine, we have to stick up for our institutions before foreigners; we can’t have them running down things we believe in and respect.”

Suddenly she was serious. “Do you know,” she said, “I’m delighted you were indignant—really I am. I didn’t like that word ‘crafty’ at all; it has been making me uncomfortable. If you like, I’ll tell Andy he has overshot the mark for once, shall I?”

“If you don’t he will soon be describing John Bull as a sleek, oily gentleman.”

“Poor old Andy!” she sighed.

“You seem to be very sorry for the fellow.”

“Oh, I am!” she said thoughtfully. “Another dear incapable . . .”

“Another?”

She laughed suddenly, teasing him from his disgruntled mood.

“You and I,” she said. “Two more.”

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Lily Christine reached home that night at half-past one she was surprised not to see Ivor's silk hat obscuring the dusty income-tax envelope on the hall table, for his party had left the restaurant quite a while before her. Mrs. Abbey was known to keep sensible hours, and whenever Ivor went out with her he was back by one o'clock at latest, which went to show that some men have to leave the straight and narrow path before it is made worth their while to lead a respectable life.

For years Lily Christine had not been with Ivor so much as she had these last few weeks. But Mrs. Abbey would not see him more than once, or at most twice, a week, she rationed him quite severely, and certainly no sensible wife could have complained of Mrs. Abbey's part in Ivor's infatuation. For one thing, it was obvious that she wasn't a snatcher, and, for another, it was only too obvious that Ivor was running after her, bothering her, pestering her. And how often it must happen to so lovely a woman to have her life made a nuisance by men whom she liked and would have wanted to keep as friends but who insisted on trying to be "something more."

Sometimes she could have wished that Mrs. Abbey was not quite so severe with Ivor, for when he could not be with her he seemed to think that nothing would do for him but to be with his wife. And what a queer hang-dog companion he was these days. Oh, he was so wary, hanging about her with his clumsy shamefacedness. And she simply could not bear that—if there was one thing she could not bear it was that shamefacedness that *led* to nothing. So she wanted to shout at him and shake him

and make him pull himself together, but somehow it would have been like driving away a beggar.

It was awful, sickening, to see him hanging about her like a bewildered schoolboy with an ailing conscience, to see him slack and unproud in his melancholy. But at the same time he seemed to be in such need of her, to be putting such trust in her friendship, that she couldn't be but melted to an uneasy, unwilling tenderness. She wished she could help him somehow, she wished she could do something for him to give him back his primitive zest for life.

For that was what he had lost. How bewildering it was, the effect Mrs. Abbey had had on him. His meeting with her had changed him from a primitive man to a complicated man. For he always had been a primitive man, one who thought that pleasure was happiness. So he had been happy with his pieces of nonsense. But what had happened to him now? Suddenly he seemed to have grown up in an unpleasant precocious way, to have passed at one bound from the primitive stage to decadence.

It was good that he had at last found out that pleasure was not happiness, that sensation and gratification palled, that there was a happiness that must be sought for and would not, like pleasure, fall into one's hand like a rotten apple. That was good, yes, but now he had gone to the other extreme with all the strength of his primitive nature and seemed to be seeking for what he wanted in the shadows of a deep, melancholy, and intolerable desire.

How he was slave-driven by himself!

She must have fallen into a doze, with the light on and a book in her hand and her spectacles on her nose, for she awoke with a start to find that it was a few minutes after three. Then Ivor must have come in long since and gone up to bed. But it was his quiet steps going upstairs that had started her out of her doze.

“Ivor !”

She heard him hesitate outside, to make sure she had called out.

“Come in, dear.”

He came in, stood in the doorway, looking at her in a preoccupied way.

“You ought to be asleep,” he said.

“I was—with the light on !”

And suddenly she felt relieved of a weight, unburdened of his heavy, clinging obsession, and at the same time very friendly to him.

“Fancy your having kept Mrs. Abbey up to this hour ! Isn’t that quite a triumph, Ivor ?”

This was the first time Mrs. Abbey’s name had been mentioned between them.

He came into the room with his slow, deliberate steps. His hands were deep in his pockets, and he shut the door behind him with a twitch of an elbow, reminding her of a large bewildered animal patiently shutting the door of its own cage on itself.

He stood by the bed, above her, looking down at her thoughtfully, taking pleasure in being there with her. And that was sweet for her to know, although she laughed at herself for being so easily pleased.

“Not much of a triumph,” he said absently. “What’s that you are reading ?”

“An Edgar Wallace. You can have it if you like.”

He bent and took it from her, his bulk suddenly weighing down on her, overpowering her with its animal-like oppression.

“Good ?” he asked, looking at the title of the book.

“Yes. Most blood-thirsty book I’ve ever read.”

He put the book under his arm, his hands back in his pockets. He looked about him in a preoccupied way.

“Don’t feel like sleeping,” he said.

" But you had better try, dear. You look more tired than I've ever seen you."

" It's this weather that's depressing. I've been thinking I might go abroad."

" It might be a good thing. Yes, why don't you ? "

He seemed to ponder on it, heavily weighing her agreement with the idea.

" I think I will," he said.

" Darling, I'll be delighted."

He was looking down at her, turning something over in his mind.

" Old cart-horse ! " she laughed, " What is it ? "

He grinned sheepishly.

" Mind if I sleep here to-night ? "

She laughed outright, enjoying him.

" I'm sorry you didn't send the request in writing. Of course, dear ! "

He was back very soon. She threw the sheets open, steeling herself against the coldness he would bring into the bed.

He said : " I'll read myself to sleep. You don't mind the light do you ? "

The bed sagged under him. But he was curiously gentle in his movements, the heavy limbs arranged themselves under the sheets with timid, almost feminine, care. Then he propped his pillow up behind his head and began reading.

She lay looking up at him, but not really seeing him. She lay in a trance of long sought-for happiness.

How surprising happiness is when it comes, how natural, unemphatic. It seems to have been always there in one, only one was too stupid to see it. One can't imagine oneself as having ever been really miserable.

She hadn't a thought in her head. She lay in a warm, blissful isolation of complete union with him.

When she awoke, it was as though she had not been to sleep at all. She could not see the time, he was between her and the clock by the bed. She lay curled up in his shadow, a small warm thing in the shadow of a friendly mountain.

The book was still open in his hands, but presently she saw that he was staring in front of him—smiling. Peering, she could see the faint glinting bristles on his chin. She was so content, it was a long time before she could actually wonder why he was smiling. Or was he smiling?

“Ivor, what is the joke?”

He did not seem at all surprised that she was awake, nor at her question. Yes, he was smiling. He did not turn his head to her when he spoke.

“You should have seen her face when I dropped her at her door—and didn’t go away, as usual!”

She waited, curled up in his shadow, staring up at his thin, fine face. What a magical night it was, he and she in a dream-like isolation.

“Why, what did you do?” she asked at last. And her own voice surprised her, it was so light, beautiful, a part of the magical night.

She could see his teeth gleaming as he smiled to himself. Like a peasant he was, smiling secretly to himself at the way the devils eat the rich.

“But where was her friend?” she asked.

“We had dropped her already.”

“And what did you do?” she repeated, not really interested but wanting to hear him talk out of his tranquil, smiling, secret being. And his secrecy was part of her too, part of their blissful, dream-like isolation.

“I forced my way in,” he said.

“What into her house!”

“You should have seen her face! She never had such a shock in her life.”

And he sat there, above her, musing, heedless of her. He was like a man smiling at his own shadow, letting his own shadow amuse him with wicked jests.

And she was with him, part of him, in their dream-like isolation. Nothing had any real existence except just themselves lying there, talking. And it did not matter what he talked about; nothing had any real existence except their union.

"She thought she had me well tamed," he said. "You should have seen her face when I began to tell her what I thought of her."

"What did you say, Ivor?"

Because she was part of him she could feel a deep laugh rumbling in his belly, a dark, throbbing, hostile laugh welling up from the shadows of his being. And she was afraid.

"Ivor, what did you say?" she whispered, watching him intently, fearfully.

But the laugh stayed locked up in him; there was nothing but that secret, musing smile on his face.

"That woman's a devil," he said.

She began laughing, pleased with his foolishness. And he sat faintly smiling, like a man with a taste for wicked jests.

"Oh, Ivor, how silly you are! Mrs. Abbey a devil!"

"Ay, she's a devil," he said softly, amused by himself.
"She'll go to hell."

She began to get helpless with laughter.

"Darling, you're crazy!"

"Perhaps. But she's wicked. I told her that."

And he sat with his secret smile, not heeding her.

"And what did she say? Did she laugh?"

"I said to her: 'You are a wicked woman, not because you do wicked things yourself but because you are the cause of other people doing wicked things.'"

"What a lot of 'wicked's,' Ivor!"

"I piled 'em on slap-dash."

"I'll bet she laughed!"

"Yes, at first she did. And I did, too." And the smile was like a shadow on his face, dark with secret laughter. "It seemed so funny standing there calling the famous Mrs. Abbey a wicked woman."

She stirred, uneasy after her laughter.

He said slowly: "Did I ever tell you I knew her husband in the war?"

"No," she said, uneasy.

"Well, Abbey committed suicide."

"But, Ivor, he was killed!"

"It's my idea he was out to get killed. I call that suicide."

"But why should he?"

"I'll bet she drove him to it," he said slowly, as though he was enjoying the words.

"Ivor, what a thing to say!"

"I'll bet she broke Abbey," he repeated slowly, not heeding her. "Hefty-looking bloke he was, too, but I always fancied he was all rotten with wanting something he couldn't get. Poor devil."

She lay curled up in his shadow, watching him intently. But she really did not take in what he said, not with her mind. A sweet warm languor kept sweeping over her, drenching her with delicious lassitude. It was bliss, this luxurious, dream-like isolation. And Ivor up there, mocking at all the world with his secret, subtle smile that she had never seen before.

"And all the time," he said softly, "she's so bloody good and respectable."

"And you'd like to call her bluff would you, funny-face?" she teased him lazily.

"I said to her: 'Look at me. I'm not good for much,

God knows, but I'm not a bad man. Well, you are making me bad.' That's what I said."

"Is she making you bad, darling?"

"Oh, I forgot! I said to her: 'I shall commit any wickedness I can to get you. I haven't many qualities left, but I have loyalty and gratitude and tenderness—and I'll sacrifice the whole damn lot to get you. And then you will be satisfied, God forgive you.'

"Darling, what a lot of sacrificing—and all because the poor woman won't have anything to do with your shop-soiled kisses!"

She could see his teeth gleaming as he grinned.

"They're a sight too good for her, anyhow," he said.

"Well, you are a funny man! You despise her, and yet you want her. Why don't you be a good boy and face the fact that she doesn't love you and leave her alone?"

"Who said she doesn't love me?"

She giggled. "I said she doesn't love you, darling."

He gave a sudden laugh—and it shocked her, frightened her.

"Oh, doesn't she!" he said.

Then for the first time he turned his head, glanced down at her. He looked tired and hopeless. The smile had been a mirage; he was just a tired and jaded man.

A wave of tenderness swept over her. She began crying very quietly. "Poor baby!" she thought. "Oh, poor baby!"

"Don't take any notice of my nonsense," he said gently. "I'm tired to death with not sleeping, that's all it is."

"All I know is," she said, laughing through her tears, "you will have to give up this Mrs. Abbey business. The next thing I know you will be loving her so much that you will be murdering her. Better go away in time, Ivor."

"To-morrow, perhaps. Sleep now, and forget my nonsense."

" What a lot of ' wicked's, ' Ivor ! "

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"To-morrow, perhaps. Sleep now, and forget my nonsense."

He turned out the light. And this time it was his hand that searched for hers and held it. She felt deliciously tired, luxuriously conscious of sinking to sleep.

She was dining at the Ducats', one of Pamela Ducat's grand dinners, royalties and decorations and what-nots, when suddenly her heart stopped beating. Now she had been expecting it to do something of the kind since her long illness after her last baby had been born dead, but how awkward it was that it should happen here. Pamela would never forgive her for being so eccentric. She could hear the hearts of all the other guests going thump, thump, thump, and she was like a silent gap among them. People began to notice it, too, looking at her sideways, and she could hear them whispering to each other : "Disgusting behaviour!" So she got up and went out into the street, the whole dinner-party bursting out into a roar of laughter as she went.

In the street a tall dark man with a high nose and smelling of sherry accosted her and said angrily : "Excuse me. Come this way." It was Ambatriadi. She was so pleased to see him, for although Ambatriadi was ever so restless and jerky he always gave one confidence. Also he gave one confidence because he was always drinking and was never the worse for it. He said angrily : "I'll tell you a thing, Lily Christine—what you need is a first-rate doctor." So they hurried on together through the traffic, Ambatriadi holding her hand, and she felt quite safe from the traffic. A policeman looked at them and laughed and said : "We can't have too much of this kind of thing. Ha—ha—ha!" Then Ambatriadi vanished and she found herself playing bridge and her partner was Mrs. Abbey.

Mrs. Abbey was dressed as a nurse and everyone deferred to her and she said to Lily Christine : "I have given up the stage because I find I can do more good

for humanity by being a nurse. That is why I have learnt how to play bridge. Yes. At first I found it very difficult but now I find I can do it quite easily if I sit very quiet and keep my mind a blank. I am afraid you are very seriously ill. Yes. You feel your heart has stopped beating, don't you? Well, it hasn't. What has really happened is that you are going dumb. You will be dumb by next Monday afternoon. Yes. But there is nothing to be frightened about if you remember to take regular meals. Here is the address of a good maid who will take care of you instead of Hempel, and everything will be just the same except that you will be dumb. Yes."

Then Lily Christine was back at home giving Hempel a week's notice because she was going to be dumb and would be needing a maid who had experience of dumb people. She watched Hempel's face very carefully while she told her that, but as Hempel only burst out laughing heartily and said, "Well, that *will* be a change!" she began to feel quite cheerful about it herself.

When she awoke, Hempel was drawing the curtains. She told Lily Christine she had seen Ivor leave the room a few minutes ago and so she had come in. It was nine o'clock. Lily Christine sat up in bed, drinking her tea and trying to take an interest in a picture paper. She felt she could sleep forever.

"Am I lunching with anyone to-day, Hempel?"

"Mr. Ambatriadi rang up last night, madam, to tell me to be sure to remind you about lunching with him."

A dim outline of her dream came back to her. She stared into space trying to reconstruct it, but she did not succeed very well.

"Your tea is getting cold, madam."

"I was thinking of a dream I had, Hempel. I think you were in it, too."

"Really, madam! Not a nightmare, I hope?"

"Just a silly dream. What are the children doing?"

"Master Timothy is being brought down to see you, madam. And miss Julia is getting herself up very smart because Lady Ducat is calling for her any moment to take her to St. George's for the bridesmaids' rehearsals. There, her ladyship's just come!"

Hempel hurried out, almost bumping into Ivor, who came in very solemnly leading Julia by the hand. Ivor was half-dressed under a faded dressing-gown, shaved and very fresh-looking, while Julia was very smart in a tiny fur coat and cap, her dark curls arranged very carefully about her pink cheeks. Hand in hand they came in and stood at the foot of the bed, looking very solemn.

"Mummy, we are going to be married!"

"You cruel girl, how can you marry your daddy when your mummy is married to him?"

"You be my bridesmaid, mummy!" Julia laughed.

Pamela Ducat came running upstairs and burst into the room.

"Mummy's going to be my bridesmaid!" Julia shouted, laughing. "Mummy's going to be my bridesmaid."

Pamela Ducat stamped about the room, making everything chilly.

"Such a job I've never taken on—collecting eight brats from the bosom of their families!"

Still Ivor and Julia stood hand in hand at the foot of the bed.

"Mummy, when shall I have my fairy clothes?"

"Her bridesmaid's gown, my lady," Hempel said to Pamela Ducat.

"Day after to-morrow, Julia," said Pamela Ducat. Oh, what a picture of health and strength and confidence Pamela was! How Lily Christine envied her.

"Now come along, child," Lady Ducat said, pulling at Julia.

But Julia did not want to leave her father. She clung to him, looking up into his face. And he grinned down at her, raising a devil in her.

"Be good, Julia, and run along!" her mother begged.

"Lily Christine, what about lunch?" said Pamela Ducat.

"I don't think I can, Pamela. I'm lunching with Ambatriadi."

"Oh, Andy! Give him my love and tell him not to drink so much. He can keep Daisy if he chuck's Maud and Robinson. Come along now, Julia."

But she clung to her daddy, and he grinned down at her, raising a devil in her.

"Ivor!" Lily Christine said warningly.

Then, still grinning down at her, he pushed her away, and she went quite readily, but oh, so proudly, showing off and forgetting to say good-bye to her mother.

Timothy had lurched in very quietly and gravely, had been lifted up onto the bed, and was staring up at Ivor. The telephone bell rang noisily beside the bed. Timothy's serious eyes watched his daddy's every movement as he picked up the telephone.

"Hello, Andy! How are you? Daisy and Maud keeping fit? Pamela Ducat's just left, saying you are a good fellow but don't drink enough. Yes, she's here."

He gave Lily Christine the telephone, picked Timothy up from the bed, put him on his shoulder, and began pacing up and down. He looked very thoughtful. And Timothy looked very thoughtful, too.

Lily Christine, talking to Ambatriadi on the telephone, watched Ivor and Timothy. She loved to see them together, but was uneasy when Ivor played with Julia. He always raised a devil in Julia, made her insufferable

for hours afterwards, but there was no devil to raise in Timothy ; worshipping for Timothy was a quiet, serious, absorbing business. How Timothy worshipped Ivor, with such utter, peaceful satisfaction ! He never took his eyes off his daddy from the moment he came into the room until the moment he left it. But Ivor never noticed Timothy for long, as he did Julia, for there was no answering devil in him. He just put him up on his shoulder—and at once forgot all about him. And Timothy, perched up there, seemed to accept that forgetfulness as quite right and proper. He just went on staring at his daddy's head in utterly absorbed satisfaction.

When she had put down the telephone Ivor said : "I'm thinking of going to Paris."

"To-day ?"

"Might as well. This evening. But I'll see how things work out during the day."

And he went on pacing about, brooding. And Timothy sat on his shoulder, staring at him, as grave as an image.

"I wish you *would* make up your mind and go, Ivor. It would be so good for you."

"Won't be much good for my pocket if I play at the Travellers' !"

"Oh, I'd rather you lost a packet than went on like this."

"Well, I'm thinking of it. But I'll see how things work out during the day. Timothy, shall I go to Paris ?"

"No !" said Timothy, and crowded with delight, but at once became serious again.

Then Ivor put him down on the bed. At first Timothy's face began to crumple up as though he was going to cry, but then he forgot to in the absorbing pursuit of watching his daddy.

"I must buck up and dress," Ivor said, lounging to

the door. "I'll be in round six and tell you my plans then."

Timothy's eyes followed his daddy to the door.

"Biggernpleeceman!" shouted Timothy, and was delighted with himself.

"Old boy, I eat three pleecemen before brekfuss every day."

Timothy was not surprised. He finished crowing and stared at his daddy in satisfied admiration.

Lily Christine suddenly cried: "Ivor, do something for me! Where are you luching?"

"Buck's, probably. Why?"

"You won't forget if I ask you to do something? It's only to be sure to ring me up at Ambatriadi's flat at about half-past two—so I can get away comfortably."

"Good Lord, Andy's safe enough!"

"Oh, yes, that! Of course. And you would never believe how kind he has been about the shop. Nappie has scarcely lost anything of his five hundred pounds. But the point is, Andy can be very talkative and I might be there all afternoon unless I have an excuse to get away—so be an angel and don't forget to ring me up."

"Right, I won't forget. See you this evening." He went out. "Coghill! Cog—hill! Where the devil are my grey flannel trousers?"

Timothy stared through the door in satisfied admiration of the noise.

"Timothy, darling, talk to me! you never talk to your mummy."

"Biggernpleeceman," said Timothy brightly. He always liked to please, did Timothy.

Hempel came in, and Lily Christine said laughing: "Has Stokes got a policeman gink whom she sees when she is out with the children? Timothy is quite taken up with one."

"Daddy biggernpleeceman," said Timothy absent-mindedly.

"I don't know, I'm sure, madam. I'll ask Stokes when she brings Miss Julia back. She'll be that flattered."

At about noon, when Lily Christine was almost ready to go out, Coghill—or rather the arm, no more than the arm, and nothing but the arm, of Coghill—thrust a large bouquet of red roses round the door. Hempel took them snappishly and laid them, the paper rustling on the bed until such time as she could see to them.

"That Coghill! He's getting worse, madam."

Lily Christine smiled. "What is the matter now, Hempel?"

"So grumpy you just can't speak to him at *all*, madam! You'd never believe such pointed silences exist as he spreads round him, and then he comes out with something nasty. Said this morning he'd be glad when he was out of this and in a place where proper servants was kept."

"Well, I don't really blame him, do you, Hempel? But he is not seriously thinking of leaving, is he?"

"Just his bit of fun, madam. He enjoys being a trial to the nerves, that's all it is."

Lily Christine, crushing her hat down on her head, caught sight of the red roses in the mirror. She had not to look at the card to know whence *they* came, and somehow the thought of Ambatriadi never failed to make her smile pleasantly. Of her three men friends, in order of seniority, Neville Parwen, Ambatriadi, and the recently discovered Harvey, all good men and true, the most worldly by far was Ambatriadi, but in the government of his life he was a child compared with the two quiet Englishmen.

Ambatriadi was very much liked by everyone in England—liked and deplored. For a man of his intelligence, he lived the most stupid life imaginable. He came

to London for October and November of every year, always took a suite high up in the Hyde Park Hotel, overlooking the park, and was much in demand for bridge, for he was said to be one of the first players in Europe. The rest of the year he spent in such centres of activity as the Lido, Cannes, Biarritz, and so on. And one could not imagine why he did, for he did not appear to be happy at such places. It wasn't easy to make him out, he was such a queer, jerky fellow.

People said he was killing himself with drink. Now and then Lily Christine would get a whiff of alcohol from him, and that was very disagreeable, but he was so kind and such a good friend that she was sorry for him and tried in vain to persuade him to stop drinking. But his answer to that always was that he did not drink half so much as people said and that people were silly and liked to exaggerate. "People" made Ambatriadi very impatient indeed. The trouble was that drink never affected his manner in any way, for he was a man so conventional and correct that the first sign in himself of vulgar unsteadiness would have caused him to stop drinking forever.

He was very handsome, a tall soldierly looking man with a high nose and gentle, tired brown eyes. But wild living had aged him so that nowadays he looked a wreck of a fine man, and his jerky restless ways were startling to strangers.

Lily Christine had known him for a long time and was grateful to him for many friendly services, for no matter where he happened to be he never had forgotten her in her long illnesses. And his devotion to her as a friend was perfumed by an admiration for her as a pretty woman, and that was very agreeable to her, too. Ambatriadi's name had at various times been coupled with beautiful women, but he never had married. At bottom

he was an unhappy, solitary man with an infinite capacity for anxious and angry devotion.

Lily Christine had come to count tremendously on his friendship. At the same time, he had a way of perturbing her a little about herself, and she was a little afraid of some secret knowledge he had of her. He seemed to know something about her she did not know, and to be faintly uneasy about her. And sometimes that secret anxiety made him queerly angry and impatient with her, and that impatience was a treasured part of their friendship, too.

Finally, arranging her small tight hat, her eyes still vaguely embraced the red roses in the mirror. Hempel took them up from the bed with a great rustling of paper.

"Oo, they're beauties!" she said.

And then she gave a cry, startling Lily Christine.

"What is it, Hempel?"

"Why, they're from . . .!"

The excitement was intense.

"That's his writing, anyhow!" said Hempel, looking at the diminutive envelope as though trying to convince herself of the impossible.

Lily Christine snatched it from her. Her hands were trembling.

"Well!" said Hempel, idiotically simpering and pushing her nose against the roses as though to convince herself they were really there.

Lily Christine read, scrawled in pencil on a small, irregular sheet of paper:

God bless you, dear one. Ivor.

She stared at the small sheet of paper, slowly flushing.

"I *said* it was his writing," Hempel said triumphantly.

And she tried to remember how long it was since *he* had last thought of sending her flowers. Three—four years.

“ Give them to me,” Lily Christine said calmly. Hempel gave her the roses, with an idiotically happy smile on her face.

“ And I’ll fill the vase with water, shall I, madam ? ”

“ No, I’ll arrange them.”

Lily Christine, with the rich red roses in her hands, did not seem to see them. She stood there staring at nothing, flushing.

She was startled out of her trance by a strange noise. Hempel, with a bright face, was weeping.

“ Oh, darling madam ! ” she sobbed. “ I’m so glad you’re happy.”

CHAPTER IX

HERE was someone else on that cheerless November day who gave a thought or two to Mr. Ambatriadi. Throughout that day Harvey found himself in that state in which a man annoys himself exceedingly. He had had a pleasant evening, dining with Lily Christine and her young friends, yet how depressed he was to-day. He kept on getting in the way of his own work to an infuriating degree.

Harvey was on the editorial staff of Lord Townleigh's great morning newspaper, and he had honour in his own profession. Able and conscientious, he had by the age of thirty-seven won for himself a position of responsibility in the newspaper world. But no doubt this swift advancement was to a large degree due to the predatory and discriminating intelligence of his chief.

This is not the place for a description of the Earl of Townleigh. It will be sufficient to say that, like all Jews who succeed to power in Anglo-Saxon countries, he had a genius for using Anglo-Saxons and a genius for letting them think they were using him. As Englishmen are colonists in dark lands, so was Lord Townleigh a colonist in England. He did not civilize but subtilize, and he let the natives sharpen their new weapon of subtlety by practising on him, and so be humbugged many a worthy man into thinking he had "got the better" of that old scoundrel Townleigh. Such are ever the agreeable diversions of conquering races.

But those natives who served Lord Townleigh loyally were generously rewarded. In the face of the public,

before the law courts in suits of slander, libel, misrepresentation, and other inevitable consequences of a successful journalistic career, Lord Townleigh never had been known to "let down" the most insignificant member of his staff. Therefore his people in their turn were loyal to him, and many loved him.

Lord Townleigh's policy was, of course, to collect around him the best available brains. But he did not make the mistake of using men according to their brains. He used them according to their characters. A man of taste in Lord Townleigh's employment was not asked to pry into other people's affairs, a man of honour never embarrassed by instructions to do what might be distasteful to him. There were toadies in plenty for such purposes.

Curiously enough, Lord Townleigh relied on finding his toadies from what is still out of politeness called the Upper House, while of course the House of Commons was also a good source of supply to him, as to every other newspaper proprietor. But he entrusted the honourable business of his newspapers to obscure and upright young men, preferring men from the provincial universities, as in the case of Harvey, to those from Oxford and Cambridge. He also employed a number of keen, steady-eyed, incorruptible young men from Australia, South America, and Canada, for as he was not English he did not have any self-conscious feeling of inferiority with them.

It was Lord Townleigh's amiable way to lunch with the Harveys and the incorruptibles, and to dine with the toadies, who were of course much more amusing dinner companions. Thus he was a man of many friendships with many contrary types of men, and each one respected something different in the masterful and boisterous old Jew.

As the cheerless day merged into dark afternoon, a

growing depression kept on snatching Harvey from his work. Above all things he would have liked to jump into a fire engine, go tearing through the gloomy, disheartening defiles of London, and join his wife for tea in front of the fire in the nursery. He could sit quietly there, getting rid of himself. But he had work to do, badly though he was doing it.

His depression was perverse, unaccountable, silly to a degree. In the course of the morning the word "crafty" had come shiftily back into his mind, and it had stayed there, wriggling, crawling, slimy, a worm of a word.

Harvey and his wife had an unusual personal regard for Mrs. Abbey the actress. Where Mrs. Abbey was concerned they were absolutely identified with their class, for it was to the great middle class that Mrs. Abbey appealed both as an actress and a woman. Whereas that other illustrious figure of the contemporary stage, the lovely and earless Ysabel Fuller, found her admirers among the very rich and the very poor, among statesmen and millionaires and gallery girls. But the middle sort would have nothing to do with the glittering, wanton, glamorous American ; Mrs. Abbey was their ideal.

The Harveys accepted Mrs. Abbey with the Englishness born in them. Besides, since his early youth Harvey's most pleasant moments in the theatre had been associated with Mrs. Abbey. He had enjoyed her as a serious actress. He did not now enjoy her the less because she played in silly, artificial pieces. Although as a reader of books he could appreciate only the best, the worst of plays could amuse him ; he thoroughly enjoyed wallowing for a couple of hours or so in sentiment which he knew perfectly well was false both to life and to art.

So Harvey had grown up with Mrs. Abbey's popularity, for she must be about his own age. And time and again she had satisfied his needs, not only as an actress, but as a

woman to respect. In short, he had rights invested in her, and rights to which men cling most tenaciously of all rights of custom, admiration, and patriotism. Of course that was not how he would have put it to himself ; in fact, such a description of his "rights" in Mrs. Abbey would have seemed to him nonsense.

And the word "crafty" in such a connection jarred on his taste and his instincts. It was like a mean blow aimed below the belt at all decent things. The word "crafty" disturbed him on account of Mrs. Abbey, and it disturbed him on account of Lily Christine. In short, it disturbed him.

During luncheon, which he and four or five of his colleagues usually enjoyed with old Townleigh in his palatial library at the top of the Fleet Street building, he had not been able to help asking the old man if he knew anything of one Ambatriadi, a Greek.

"Andy!" boomed old Townleigh. "A grand man! But don't play bridge with him—he makes a child of an average good player."

Harvey felt quite childish enough as it was, childishly disappointed. He could not help respecting old Townleigh's instincts about men. Anything the old man said about women Harvey would keep an open mind about, but old Townleigh had been right so often in his judgments of men that those judgments must be respected by all who knew him well.

"A very good fellow," old Townleigh added. "Pity he drinks."

"Ah, a drunkard!" thought Harvey. And he was inexpressibly cheered.

"Ambatriadi," said old Townleigh, "is an unfortunate modern Greek. There is nothing of the modern Greek about him except his Mediterranean distrust of England as a humbug and a hypocrite—in which, as a Greek, he is

quite right. But he is an aristocrat born, and so modern Greece can never be a home for him. Had he been born an Englishman, he might have done something. As it is, he is just . . . charming and incapable. But get him to talk—and you will find him an uncommonly good gossip. You should hear him on the English mission to Athens during the war, or on Lloyd George's policy after the war of giving Venizelos a swelled head and so ruining Greece. That reminds me, young Harvey—be sure and see that Kempeltown lets us have his notes on Soviet fuel by Wednesday evening at latest."

Harvey did his best to remain cheered by the fact that the confounded fellow was a drunkard. He promoted him to dipsomania, to delirium tremens. But as the afternoon darkened he found he couldn't construct a picture of this Ambatriadi as a man so mean in spirit as to try wantonly to belittle a woman like Mrs. Abbey. The fellow was apparently a gentleman.

But it was with relief that Harvey grabbed at and clung to the way in which the old man had described the Greek as one who had a "Mediterranean distrust of England as a humbug and a hypocrite." Well, wouldn't that "Mediterranean distrust"—confound the fellow's impudence—very well stretch to "distrusting" a very English sort of woman like Mrs. Abbey? And no doubt the fellow, just to prove his case, was always on the look-out for the worst in well-known Englishmen and women. What fools that *perfidie Albion* prejudice made of any number of otherwise intelligent foreigners!

At a little after five his buzzer informed him that his lordship was ready to see him. Their business dismissed, Harvey was putting his papers together when it occurred to him to ask the old man if he knew Mrs. Abbey—personally, of course.

Old Townleigh surprised him by not answering

immediately. Old Townleigh surprised him by pensively stroking his magnificent beard. And Old Townleigh surprised him by suddenly levelling at him those boisterous, mischievous, penetrating eyes of his, and saying :

“ Getting worried about our friend Lily Christine, are you ? ”

Harvey laughed at his own confusion, for of course he ought to have known that it was the old man’s pride to find the time to keep himself informed about everything that was going on in every circle, political, social, financial, and literary. Besides, in the last year quite a few of Lily Christine’s friends, but not her most intimate ones, had begun working for his papers in one capacity or another. The old man liked having about him those rather impoverished, handsome, dashing young people. He thought they were dashing, anyhow. They certainly dashed around him, licking his boots in that frank cheerful way some well-brought-up young people have. But their dependence flattered his stupid side, and where is the man of intelligence who has not a stupid side ?

Harvey laughed. “ No, I wasn’t in the least worried about Mrs. Summerest. There’s nothing to worry about, so far as I know.”

“ Of course,” the old man said thoughtfully, looking at Harvey as though he might be concealing something. “ Lily Christine herself isn’t worried by any chance, is she ? ”

Now Harvey had not bargained on discussing Lily Christine. He had merely thought to ask the old man if he knew Mrs. Abbey, who was a public figure, but it was not at all his business to discuss a private person like Lily Christine. The old newspaper-magnate, alas, did not admit the existence of private people. How often Harvey

had thanked his stars that he had nothing to do with the personal side of journalism.

"We haven't discussed it," he said.

The old man sat stroking his beard thoughtfully.

"Nothing to worry about at all," he said musingly, "unless, of course . . ."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Unless, of course, Mrs. Abbey likes Summerest."

And the old man flashed one of those barefaced, penetrating looks of his which as good as told you what a liar you were or were about to be. But Harvey found this ground much more to his comfort.

"Well, I suppose she does quite like him, sir. But even so——"

"Don't be guileless, young Harvey. I meant, of course, unless she likes him seriously."

Harvey could not help smiling. The suspicious old pirate!

"There's apparently no danger of that, sir. In fact, so far as I can gather, a wife's rather glad than otherwise if her husband is in no worse keeping than that, for Mrs. Abbey is not——"

Old Townleigh banged on the table.

"Mrs. Abbey is not!" he boomed. "I'm sick to death of hearing what Mrs. Abbey is not. I say she *is*!"

"Is what, sir?" Harvey smiled.

"A devilish tricky woman!"

Harvey simply couldn't help grinning from ear to ear.

"Oh, I know you young men grin at me! Grin away—but I'm generally right. Mind you, I'm bound to tell you I know nothing at all against Mrs. Abbey. But that is my considered judgment."

"You must admit, sir, that it's a judgment very much at variance with the facts."

"Facts? He says facts! Well, what are the facts?"

"That she is an uncommonly nice woman who has never allowed success to spoil her in the least."

"Then here are some more 'facts'—that she is in an unusual position, that she has capitalized decency in a remarkably clever way, that her propriety is a household word like Sir James Barrie's shyness—and so, of course, she has to be confoundedly careful when she has a lover."

So the old man's impatiences with the *appearance* of things would always sweep him on, often to stupendous absurdities. Quite unscrupulous and shameless he was in his prejudices, but he did not in the least mind being laughed at for them. Indeed, there was a strong streak of buffoonery in him which made him enjoy being laughed at for his unscrupulous suspicions.

But whether the old man had minded or not, Harvey could not have helped laughing outright.

"Why, everyone knows what Mrs. Abbey is, sir ! It's impossible even to associate her with the idea of a—I mean, she just isn't that sort ! "

"I'll tell you what she is, young Harvey—a very beautiful woman, ten years a widow, and getting near the dangerous age."

The old man suddenly became serious.

"Mind you, I'm not saying she has lovers—I know nothing whatsoever against her. But I've no doubt at all she is a devilish tricky woman, and I only hope for Lily Christine's sake that she isn't taking Summerest seriously. He's an uncommonly attractive sort of fool, and even if he is penniless she has more than enough put away to marry any man she likes."

Harvey stared, amazed. The old man, stroking his beard, seemed to have forgotten him.

"Do you mean, sir, that Lily Chri—Mrs. Summerest—might have to divorce him ? "

"No," said old Townleigh thoughtfully. "No, I'm wrong. It wouldn't do at all . . ."

"I should think not!"

"No," said old Townleigh slowly, "Mrs. Abbey would never, could never, marry a divorced man."

He seemed to awake from a deep calculation.

"Well, good night, young Harvey."

"Good night, sir."

But as Harvey opened the door the old man turned heavily in his chair.

"By the way, tell her this——"

"Mrs. Summerest?"

"Yes. Tell her as coming from me, if you like, I'm an old friend—advise her not to be provoked by Summerest into doing anything silly."

"Anything silly?" Harvey repeated stupidly.

"Oh, good night to you!" boomed the old man.

And Harvey went. But the boisterous voice came after him through the closed door.

"Warn her, man!"

Now the effect of old Townleigh's prejudice against Mrs. Abbey was naturally to reassure Harvey about the whole thing, to make him laugh. Positively childish the old man would be when he suspected someone of hidden motives. Time and again, of course, with his amazing power of penetration into men and affairs, his suspicions would eventually be justified—whereupon he would as like as not be delighted with the unmasked object of his suspicions and do his very best to make a friend of the same. He liked people to live up to his suspicions, that was what it was.

Harvey could not help but chuckle at a mental glimpse he had of the old man and his henchmen doing their damnedest for years to find out something, anything, with which to "unmask" Mrs. Abbey's propriety—and failing

ignominiously. "I'm bound to tell you I know nothing at all against her." Naturally, the old man would detest Mrs. Abbey for that; he simply could not abide those mean-spirited people who would not lift a finger to help him prove his case against them.

So it was not with the idiotic idea of "warning" Lily Christine, whatever that meant, that at a little after six he left the underground at Hyde Park Corner and walked through the chill, sodden streets to the small, narrow house in the small, narrow street. For now that he had cast off his depression he was not yearning so urgently for Muriel's company—which occurred to him, too, and as he rang the bell he made a mental note to tell his wife of it so that she should know him for the man he was.

The estimable Coghill appeared to be in an even surlier mood than usual, for he did not so much as answer Harvey's awkward greeting but merely stood aside to let him pass upstairs.

As he approached the bedroom door he heard Lily Christine's raised voice. No doubt she was talking on the telephone. And so she was, standing by the bed and twirling her spectacles in one hand so that it was a wonder they did not come to pieces.

As he came in she said into the telephone: "Here is Rupert Harvey. Shall I ask him? He's an intellectual kind of man."

"Ask me without flattery," Harvey said, "then I'll know where I am."

"It's Nappie—he is ringing up all over London for a volunteer to go with him to Richmond to see a Russian play. Now why not you? You look in the pink of health."

"Richmond! A Russian play! No, I'm not tired enough of life for that."

So she talked into the telephone again, while he approached the gay, dancing fire. Summerest was sitting

there, deep in the only arm-chair, staring into the bright flames. The light was dancing on his brooding face, as though daring him to smile.

He looked up as Harvey came near.

"Beastly evening. Like a whiskey-and-soda?"

"I should. Shall I mix you one, too?"

"No, thanks. I'm unlucky; the stuff is no help to me."

The decanter and syphon were on a tray among the papers and letters on Lily Christine's desk. Tilted sideways against a book was a basket of peaches, and the peaches somehow looked unbelievably beautiful, so that Harvey, although he did not in the least want one, had to resist an instinct to take one up and caress it with his fingers.

With his drink in his hand, he lifted some illustrated papers off a footstool and sat down near the fire. Lily Christine was still talking on the telephone. Harvey's eyes rested gratefully on a mass of deep red roses in which she and the telephone seemed to be entangled.

Summerest sat staring into the fire. Harvey would have liked to take a bet that, although Summerest dimly recognized his face and had heard his name spoken but a minute before, he would have been hard put to it to call him by name.

Summerest, in his slow-moving voice, said: "How you used to hate me at school, Harvey!"

And turning from the fire he shot a faint smile at Harvey.

Harvey had not seen that smile since he was a fag at school, but now he remembered it very well, the attractive likeable smile which Summerest would always be turning on people to make them like him.

And Harvey childishly made up his mind to resist it now as he had resisted it at school.

"I didn't like you," he said.

" Devilish clever fellow you were, I seem to remember. Why, you were almost in the Sixth as a fag, weren't you ? "

" The fact was, I couldn't have afforded to go to the place at all if I hadn't somehow won a scholarship."

Lily Christine came and sat on the arm of Summerest's chair. He still sat faintly smiling across at Harvey ; seemed to be musing on him, almost as though Harvey was an idea that had suddenly occurred to him.

And Harvey closed himself up against him, made himself hostile. He glanced at Lily Christine, the way she sat on the arm of her husband's chair in happy, unthinking love and companionship. What was it she loved in the fellow ?

" Odd ! " Summerest said. " I was just remembering . . . "

" What, Ivor ? "

" Harvey here. He was quite a kid, while I was—well, Harvey, I was rather a blood, wasn't I ? "

" Our best type of English public-school boy," Harvey murmured, and they all laughed.

Summerest, sprawling in his chair, looked up at Lily Christine.

" And would you believe it—this kid—I mean as he was then—quite put me out by not liking me ! Odd, wasn't it ? "

She lazily passed her fingers through his crisp fair hair.

" Poor Ivor ! And in spite of all your popularity, too ! "

" Yes, quite put me out. Most odd ! "

" Aren't you," Harvey said, " rather exaggerating ? You were the best-liked man at school, and I'm sure you didn't care much whether or not a mere fag——"

" Well," Summerest said slowly at the fire, " things are rather like that aren't they ? "

Lily Christine laughed at his heavy thoughtfulness, rumpling his hair.

" Speak up, Ivor ! Things are rather like what ? "

" It's fun—of course—to be liked—but all the fun somehow collapses if just one person won't fall into line with the rest. That one person somehow becomes more important than the rest put together—"

" I never knew a man so greedy ! "

" I suppose popularity makes one greedy. But it's a tricky thing to manage. The odd thing is . . . you feel that the one person who doesn't like you has much better reasons for his *not* liking than all the rest put together have for their liking."

" In fact, you feel—found out ? "

" Yes." He laughed. " Found out. Odd ! "

Harvey, curiously ashamed of his childish hostility, yet resenting that feeling, murmured : " I hadn't any reason. It was just silliness. Jealousy, probably. Lily Christine may I have another whiskey-and-soda, please ? "

" It's there for you, dear. And will you have a peach ? "

Stretching her arm backward to get the basket of peaches, she smiled at Harvey.

" I lunched with your friend Ambatriadi to-day, and afterward he sent me these."

Summerrest sat staring into the fire, brooding. Harvey declining a peach, Lily Christine held out the basket to him. As he mixed himself a drink Harvey noticed that Summerrest, without so much as glancing at the peaches, absent-mindedly but quite unerringly picked the best one from the basket.

The feckless, greedy, brooding man ! The room was cheerful in the dancing firelight, but Harvey felt that it was darkened by Summerrest's mood.

Strangely, heavily, disagreeably unreticent the fellow was in his melancholy. Apart from the superficial side of him that enjoyed being " liked," he didn't care what others thought, didn't care how much he inconvenienced them.

His melancholy filled the room, mastering all other moods, for while he was careless of others they were influenced by him. And that was the strength of the stupid fellow, that people's moods gave way before his, and his selfishness fed on their sense of oppression. His selfishness was a blind giant who fed on everything that came his way. That was the strength of the big-boned, slow-moving, clumsy fellow, that he did not look on what he was treading or whether he was going, he just went on and on, blind to everything but his own brooding desires, blind to his own happiness and his own destiny, a blind clumsy man with no will but the will to satisfy his needs. And how his needs drove him, egging and nagging and shoving his great clumsy body on and on ! A poor, daft hulk of a man, that was all he was, plodding the earth in search of what he wanted, when all the time he had only to stop and look around him to find all the happiness any man *could* want. But on he plodded, blind and bewildered, the poor daft selfish hulk.

Harvey was startled out of his trance by Lily Christine's laugh.

"Well, you are a fine couple ! Both so lost in thought that one of you is spilling his whiskey and the other has dropped his peach ! "

Harvey pick up the peach from the carpet. The beautiful soft thing was bruised by its fall. The selfish, feckless devil. Quite unconsciously he picked the best, and then he dropped it.

Summerest, deep in his chair, stirred lazily.

"Going ?" Lily Christine said.

"Better start. Want to look in at a few places first."

And with a heave of his great limbs, he stood up, disarranging the room. He did not move away, but stood there. Harvey would not look up. He was angry, exasperated. What the devil and all did the fellow want, choking

up the room with his gloom? And the fineness of that small head on that great clumsy body exasperated him.

Harvey, on his footstool, would not look up. He could smell the damp edges of the fellow's trousers. He had an almost unbearable desire to collar him round the knees and bring his hulking body crashing to the ground. It made him tingle to think of. What a satisfaction, to feel that blind, big-boned hulk crashing down.

"Well, good-bye, Harvey. May not see you for some time."

"Going away?"

As the fellow did not answer, Harvey looked at Lily Christine. She was still on the arm of the empty chair, smoking.

"Paris," she said, throwing her cigarette into the fire.

Summerest, opening the door, hesitated. He did not turn, did not stop, but Harvey *felt* him hesitate.

He never forgot that moment, staring at the fellow's powerful back, seeing into it, knowing that Summerest was ashamed. Yes, he was ashamed of something, and he hesitated in his shame. What a fool he was not to turn round and tell them why he was ashamed.

Summerest opened the door and went out.

Harvey had quite forgotten Lily Christine. Like a shadow she flitted across his eyes and went out of the room, leaving the door open.

"Ivor, don't go without saying good night to the children."

"Won't they be asleep?"

"Timothy's crying, I can hear him. Listen."

"Yes. The young devil."

"And for you, probably. Biggernplecceman. Come on."

Harvey heard them going upstairs, up, up, Lily Christine patterning, then Summerest's slow, heavy steps. What

was in the fellow's mind ? What was he up to ? Why was he ashamed ?

Harvey sat on, haunched up on the stool by the fire. It was time he was going. He kept on thinking : " It's time I was going."

Lily Christine came in, closed the door, flitted about nervously.

" It's time I was going," Harvey said.

She flitted about nervously, putting things here and there.

" Poor Ivor ! " she said.

" Is this going abroad a sudden decision ? "

" The Englishman's last resource—Paris ! "

So he was going away to forget Mrs. Abbey, was he ? Then he must have been wrong in thinking the fellow was up to something that made him ashamed. All the same, he felt he had not been wrong.

" Well, it's a good thing," he said.

" Of course it is. What is the use of his going on like this ? I'm glad for Mrs. Abbey's sake, too."

She laughed nervously, but there was happiness in her laughter too.

" Fancy the poor man ever thinking he could make an impression on her ! Why, even the English couldn't have taken the Rock of Gibraltar if there had been a Mrs. Abbey on it."

Harvey smiled, thinking of old Townleigh banging his wise old alien head against the Rock of Gibraltar and getting furious because it wasn't, as he had suspected, made of plaster of Paris.

She said : " Rupert, you don't like him, do you ? "

He got up from his stool, slowly, thinking that out.

" I don't know," he said at last.

And that was the truth ; he did not know. But he was positive he would have liked him very much if he had

come back into the room from the doorway and told them what was weighing on his mind, why he was ashamed.

Lily Christine raised her face from among the roses. "I don't see how anyone can manage *not* to like him, he is so helpless!"

"But isn't that just it—that other people rather have to suffer for that helplessness of his?"

"No, he suffers most," she said slowly. And she threw herself into the arm-chair with a sigh.

He was going, but turned round to smile: "Oh, what a sigh!"

"Did I sigh? I was thinking of Mrs. Abbey. I'm so relieved Ivor has gone away. You see, he is a very wearing sort of man when he thinks he is in love, most wearing, with a stern, austere, incorruptible sort of helplessness about him that simply eats into a woman's resistance. You can imagine what it must feel like to a nice person like Mrs. Abbey to have her resistance eaten into, can't you? And I'm sure she will tell me as much when I see her to-night."

Harvey was delighted she was seeing the actress that night.

"I didn't tell Ivor," she added, because it might have made him uncomfortable. Men are so self-conscious that they always think two women together must be laughing about them when all they are doing is—making their fall easy. Yes, she and I are going to have a quiet supper together."

It delighted him, the idea of those two pleasant women talking that difficult monster over, trying to understand one another, disposing of his nonsense once for all. It delighted him enormously and at the same time relieved him, for the picture of Lily Christine and Mrs. Abbey having supper together somehow had the effect of allowing his admiration of Mrs. Abbey to emerge intact from

the grubby suspicions of those two foreigners, old Town-leigh the Jew and Ambatriadi the Greek.

At home, over dinner, he told Muriel that those young people might live muddled, unsatisfactory lives but that they had a way of doing things which he admired and enjoyed watching. For instance, a young woman doted on her silly husband, but what did she do when he fancied himself in love with another woman? Did she hate the other woman? or even dislike her? be unpleasant about her? think to herself that she was trying to snatch her silly, handsome husband from her? not a bit of it; they had supper together.

"And who is the other woman?" Muriel asked judicially.

But Harvey had prepared himself for that question. He said he did not know. For he was curiously reluctant to tell Muriel that it was, of all people, Mrs. Abbey. Muriel was so strong a supporter of Mrs. Abbcy's that the very idea of Summerest daring to bother her with his nonsense might prejudice her, unreasonably enough, against Lily Christine, on the ground that she ought not to let the silly fellow bother decent women.

CHAPTER X

RS. ABBEY had her car with her, a dark blue Daimler limousine—just like Queen Mary's, thought Lily Christine, except for the colour, which was quieter—and after supper she very kindly offered to drop Lily Christine on her way home. But as Mrs. Abbey lived in Regent's Park, Lily Christine would not let her go so far out of her way, preferring to take a taxi.

Mrs. Abbey's last words were : " You'll see, he will have forgotten all about me by the time he comes back."

Mrs. Abbey had a rather loud, quite unaffected laugh, very pleasant and reassuring in a woman so lovely. A frank and enjoyable laugh it was, having nothing to do with a subtle-mannered, insincere world. And it had the same warming effect on one, coming from that fair, perfectly formed face, as a cup of Bovril on a beautiful but chilly day.

Both were in day clothes, and, Lily Christine having called for Mrs. Abbey at the theatre, they had gone to supper at the grill room of the Savoy, which is an airy, spacious room devoted after eleven o'clock to theatrical people who take their suppers seriously and do not want music and fandelals around them.

Mrs. Abbey took her supper very seriously, saying she never ate more than a sandwich before playing in the evenings. Lily Christine had a chicken sandwich, and they talked.

Time and again Lily Christine found herself thinking : " I couldn't like her more ! " Most of all she liked the effect of the actress's beautiful grey eyes—they were so

sane and sympathetic, they weren't remote, they—well, they *connected* one with her in the kindest way.

From the beginning Mrs. Abbey was quite frank with her.

"How men can be so silly," she smiled, "is a wonder to me. Take your Ivor, an intelligent man—"

Lily Christine was delighted. It was, after all, a compliment to her.

"Oh, you think Ivor is intelligent!"

"Yes, but he doesn't know it!" And Mrs. Abbey laughed in that rather loud, enjoyable way. "It's all inside, isn't it? He's got a brooding broody sort of mind—"

"Hasn't he just! And mostly hatching plots against himself."

"Of course—that's his pleasure in life. What was I saying? Oh yes, there he is, an intelligent man, yet when he first met me and thought he liked me what did he do but play the same old game that all men try to play—pretend he was unhappy at home!"

How vividly Lily Christine recalled that ride in the Hawk-Ellis to Maidenhead. How shocked she had been! Poor Ivor, what a shame it was to be discussing his baby tin-pot schemes. But if ever a man had brought that on himself, he had.

Mrs. Abbey ate with great enjoyment and appetite, smiling to herself.

"Time and again," she said, "if I had wanted to be cruel to him I'd have laughed right out when he was pretending to be unhappy at home, for it's easy to see that if there's one woman in the world he really cares about, it's you."

Lily Christine flushed with pleasure, taking a large piece of her chicken sandwich in her nervousness.

And Mrs. Abbey said a strange thing.

Looking with her lovely grey eyes full at Lily Christine, she said :

“ You know, you must never let him down.”

What a strange thing to say, thought Lily Christine. How could *she* let Ivor down ?

She laughed confusedly, saying : “ Let him down ! But how could I ? ”

Mrs. Abbey went on eating seriously, thoughtfully.

“ You see,” she said slowly, “ he has put you on a pedestal. I wonder if you realize how true that is. I’m not trying to flatter you, my child—and you are a child in years compared with me. For him you aren’t like other women ; you are miles above them, a woman apart. Yes. Believe me, he puts you and me in different worlds.”

Lily Christine did not know what to say for embarrassment. Yes, from what Ivor had said last night she thought it was true that he put Mrs. Abbey and herself in different worlds. Any other woman but Mrs. Abbey might have been jealous of that, might have tried to turn Ivor against his wife.

“ Yes,” Mrs. Abbey said, ever so seriously. “ So that is your responsibility.”

“ My responsibility ? ”

“ Don’t you see—you must never let him think differently of you.”

Lily Christine laughed confusedly, at a loss what to say. She could not very well say the only thing that came into her mind : “ How can he ever think differently of me ? In me you see the world’s most faithful wife.”

“ You must forgive my saying these things,” Mrs. Abbey said gently, “ but I am an older woman and—oh, very experienced ! There are some men whose whole joy in life would go if, no matter how they seemed to neglect their wives, they were ever given the least cause to suspect—anything. And your Ivor is one of those—oh,

essentially ! Yes. As for me," she added, smiling, " that's just silliness."

Lily Christine couldn't help feeling it was high time she said something nice, too. But at that moment she admired Mrs. Abbey so unreservedly, was so delighted with her *rightness* as a woman in seeing and applauding the fact that Ivor thought better of his wife than of any other woman, that it was difficult to accommodate her admiration to a simple statement.

" No, it's not silliness," she said at last. " Ivor's admiration of you isn't silliness at all. In fact, it's . . . it's the first sign I've had for years that he is growing up."

Mrs. Abbey was eating a cold lamb cutlet or two. She ate very thoughtfully.

" To be quite frank," she said slowly, " he *has* been rather silly lately. Last night . . ."

Lily Christine wondered if there *could* have been anything in Ivor's dream-conversation with her last night, if he really *had* said all those sour-grape things to Mrs. Abbey.

" Oh, Ivor's difficult ! " she said helplessly.

" Insistent," Mrs. Abbey said, turning to her salad. " Yes. But they all get like that—they urge themselves on. Last night . . . Yes, he was very silly."

Lily Christine was angry with Ivor, deeply angry, for having told *her* anything of his silly scene with Mrs. Abbey. He had no right to tell her ; it made her feel treacherous to the nice woman sitting beside her. Why *would* he drag her into his silly messes ?

" Did he tell you anything about it ? " Mrs. Abbey asked, dissecting the heart of the lettuce.

" Tell me ? " Lily Christine felt her voice flickering. Oh, why was Ivor so outrageously unreticent, why did he tell her these things about other people ? It made her feel she had been listening at the keyhole.

"No," she said. "He has always been very shy of saying anything about you to me."

And so he had—until that unreal dream-talk last night.

Mrs. Abbey asked the waiter—or rather the *maître d'hôtel*, for he was serving them in person—to bring her a pear. Lily Christine could not help fancying that Mrs. Abbey's voice, which never was inclined to be hesitating, was even firmer and more straightforward than it had been. Well, no doubt she was glad Ivor hadn't told her anything of his wretched behaviour.

"You see," the great actress said intimately, "it's lovely to have Ivor for a friend. Yes. And I wouldn't sacrifice his friendship easily. But when he gets silly . . ."

Lily Christine, sighing, finished her chicken sandwich.

"I hope you won't think I was cruel," Mrs. Abbey said, "but last night I told him I simply couldn't cope with him any more unless he behaved himself. He was so angry!"

And she laughed so enjoyably that Lily Christine could not help laughing too. Poor Ivor, what a shame it was to be laughing at him! But if ever a man had asked for it . . .

"So angry he was," Mrs. Abbey said smiling, "that he didn't even ring me up to-day to say good-bye."

"Downright rudeness!" said Lily Christine.

"No, manliness," Mrs. Abbey laughed. "So he has finished with me, you see."

In point of fact, Lily Christine was surprised at the almost casual way in which Mrs. Abbey dismissed Ivor. She was almost hurt in her pride in Ivor's attractiveness, childish though she knew that feeling to be.

She gathered there had been a long series of Ivors in Mrs. Abbey's life. Well, she could easily understand why. She was as lovely as a siren and at the same time she had that sympathy and kindness which is usually given to

plain women to offset their homeliness. How men must have plagued her and pestered her ! One by one they had worshipped and had been sent away miserable and had come back as friends—or had not come back at all. She wondered if Ivor would have the grace and generosity to realize his defeat and come back as a friend. It was doubtful, though. He'd feel self-conscious about it. The mean things self-consciousness was responsible for !

More and more decidedly Lily Christine felt that Mrs. Abbey really must be a remarkable woman to have remained so nice and sensible and unspoilt through the ordeal of so much admiration.

But the moment she liked the actress most of all was when she said :

“ Now please don't run away with the idea that I don't care a fig for your Ivor—because I do. Yes. You see, I'm nearly thirty-eight, just the age when we all enjoy an attractive man's admiration—and it's no good saying we don't ! ”

“ If only he could be reasonable,” Lily Christine sighed, “ you and he might be such friends. What a pity it is—these senseless ruptures ! But when he comes back, Mrs. Abbey, you must please be kind and let him see you now and then—that is, if it won't bore you too much. It is what he needs, a friend like you.”

“ You'll see, he will have forgotten me by then ! ” Mrs. Abbey cried with her rather loud, enjoyable laugh. And as the large Daimler bore her away, and Lily Christine stood waiting for a taxi, she said to herself that Mrs. Abbey was one of the most understanding women she had ever met.

She was surprised, as the taxi drove up to the door, to see the light on behind the fanlight. Why, it must be nearly one o'clock. Coghill must have forgotten to turn it off.

She paid off the taxi and fumbled in her bag for her latchkey. But the door was opened for her. She stared with astonishment at Neville Parwen in the doorway.

“Nannie !”

“Come in, dear ; don’t stand out in the cold.”

“But I thought you went to the Russian play !”

“It was over early.”

“But what’s the matter ?”

She never could make Nannie out quickly. His quivering, sensitive gentlemanliness was always as a mask at important moments.

Then, in the narrow hall, she saw Hempel somewhere behind him, fluttering, like a woman distraught. Lily Christine thought of the children. What had happened ?

“Hempel, what is it ?”

“Oh, madam !”

Lily Christine stamped her foot. “*What is it, Hempel ?*”

Parwen said gently : “The children are all right, dear. It’s only . . .”

But in her relief Lily Christine did not care what it was. She leaned against the wall, sighing.

“You gave me such a scare, Hempel !” she said. “Fluttering about like that !”

“Oh, madam, I’m that upset !”

Lily Christine looked helplessly at Nannie. So grave he was, so gentle.

“It’s only that Coghill has gone,” he said.

“Coghill ?” she said laughing, it seemed so funny.

“And Hempel, not knowing what to do, rang me up, and so here I am.”

“Coghill gone, Nannie ? But gone where, how, why ? Hempel !”

“Oh, madam, I went out just for an hour or so and when I got back—Coghill had gone !”

Lily Christine looked helplessly at Nappie. Now *why* had Hempel been born? For what purpose?

"Come in here a moment," Parwen said. And they went into the unused little sitting-room.

Lily Christine couldn't help laughing. Coghill gone . . . where? Why?

"Nappie, what *is* all this about?"

But he hid himself behind that quivering, impassive gentlemanliness.

"The point is," he said impassively, "Coghill has gone with Ivor's luggage."

"Stolen it! *Coghill!*"

That quivering, sensitive mask. But out of it his kind eyes looked at her very anxiously.

"Nappie, Coghill a thief!"

Staring at him, she couldn't get over it.

"Well," he said slowly, "well, not quite. . . ."

"Oh!" she whispered, staring at him.

But Nappie had been so hurt by this outrageous thing that he could scarcely force a word from out behind that quivering, sensitive mask.

"Nappie!" she said. "Nappie, it's not true!"

"I'm afraid so, dear. Hempel found a discarded label addressed to the 'Travellers', Paris. So what else can it mean?"

She sat down on the arm of a chair, her fingers over her open mouth, staring at him stupidly.

"Oh, no!" she said.

And nothing in her brain connected with anything else. Everything stuck out stupidly, bits of things.

"He sent me some flowers only this morning," she said.

Intently she followed every movement Nappie made, never taking her eyes off him while he took out a cigarette from a thick gold case and lit it.

And she could feel him trying to master his disgust at what he had to say.

"Very unusual thing for him to do, wasn't it?" he said impassively.

She nodded, staring at him. She would not think, she must not. So the flowers were his way of saying good-bye. But she must not think.

"Well," he said thoughtfully, not looking at her.

"But I've just left Mrs. Abbey!" she said in a high voice. "She's—she's finished with him."

"I don't suppose," he said, slowly, looking at his cigarette. "she has anything to do with it one way or the other." He flushed. "He has just . . . decamped."

"Give me your cigarette, Nappie."

She took it, inhaled deeply.

"Well," she said, "It's a fine look out. . . ."

He stared at his shoes thoughtfully. What it must cost him not to say, "Good riddance!" Nappie, very dear Nappie!

"What I can't understand is," she said calmly, "the cruelty of it. Like a slap in the face—suddenly!"

"I suppose," he said slowly, "he must have been planning this for some time. But when it came to the point he was . . . he lost his head and didn't dare tell you it was all over, but just . . . did a bunk."

"No, I don't believe he planned it," she said, smoking. She was surprised that she was so calm. Well . . . what a life!

She looked at Nappie, dear Nappie, trying so hard not to show how much *he* was hurt for her sake. And her heart clumped.

"Oh, my dear, I'm so glad you're here!" she sobbed.

Parwen with an arm about her, persuaded her upstairs.

"You're done up, Lily Christine. Better go to bed."

In the bedroom Hempel was fluttering about with red eyes.

"Please, madam," she begged.

But Lily Christine was too listless even to pull off her hat.

"Hempel, that will do. Go away now—do!"

But Hempel, looking anxiously at her mistress, did not want to go, could not bear to go.

"Go away, *please!*" Lily Christine sobbed frantically, and Hempel was frightened and went.

At last Lily Christine pulled off her hat and held her hand to her forehead. She tried to collect her thoughts, but they were all over the place, running away from her one moment and jeering at her the next.

She sat on the bed, her hands on her lap, her eyes on the floor, trying to think. She remembered a phrase used by her aunt's head gardener when she was a child.

"Well," she said, "this beats rat-catching!"

Neville Parwen, his overcoat still on but unbuttoned, stood with his back to the dying fire. There was something almost beautiful about his chubby scholarly face when he was alone with Lily Christine. But he could not help her. He was quite helpless in the chaos of her unhappiness.

"Why not come home with me for to-night?" he said at last. "Sonia will never forgive me if I let you stay alone to-night. Or shall I ring her up to come and stay with you?"

All that she could think of was that it was not like Ivor. No, it was not like Ivor. He was a moral coward, but he was not heartless. No, it was not like Ivor. She sat with her hands slack in her lap, staring up at Nannie.

"It's not like Ivor," she said.

"No," he agreed slowly.

He wanted to be fair to the man. He never had liked

Summerest. But neither had he ever thought Summerest was a bad, a heartless man.

"Nappie, it's not a bit like him! Why, only this morning he sent me—"

And they both looked at the deep red roses, which Hempel in her agitation had forgotten to take out of the room for the night.

And suddenly she knew in her heart that just because he *had* sent her the roses it was true that he had gone from her. She saw the finger of God pointing at her from among the roses.

What was so terrible was that he had not trusted her. He had not trusted to her friendship. That was so appalling to her. The one thing that had been between them, the one thing for which she had worked so hard, the one beautiful, indestructible achievement, was that friendship. But the indestructible had fallen down at one clumsy push. Her friendship had been worth nothing to him, he had not put his trust in it. He had not dared to, or he had not cared to. And he had slunk away.

But it was not like him. That was what she could not understand. It was not like him, this heartlessness.

"There's something behind this, she said decidedly. "Someone."

She stared at Nappie, who was looking thoughtfully at the points of his shoes.

"Nappie, do you think it *could* be Mrs. Abbey?"

"But you say you've just left her, dear, and that she—"

And she knew it could not be Mrs. Abbey. How could it be? There was an awful mystery somewhere. Oh, what was Ivor up to!

"Well, we won't get anywhere talking about it to-night," Parwen said, looking thoughtfully at the

points of his shoes. "Perhaps there will be a letter in the morning."

But was it a mystery? Where was the mystery? What was the good of making it into a mystery? The truth was that he had got tired of her, and had left her. He had had enough of her and her friendship, couldn't stick it any more, and so he had slunk away. He wanted something else more satisfying.

She jumped up from the bed, startling Parwen.

"What is it, dear?"

Fancy slinking away like this, out of her life. After all these years. Slinking away not caring how much he hurt.

"Oh, Nappie!" she said, blindly clutching at him.

He held her anxiously, feeling utterly helpless.

"But what will Timothy do, Nappie?"

What would Timothy do without his daddy? Biggern-pleeceman.

She stared at him, her eyes stretched wide with a terrible thought.

"Nappie, all these years—he has just been—heartless all the time?"

And she saw the finger of God in her life, from the beginning to the end of her life, working against her and all that was hers.

Parwen took up the telephone. "Sonia is waiting up for me. I'll tell her I am bringing you back for the night. You can't stay here in the state you are in."

She did not hear him. She stood looking about her, frightened, her eyes stretched wide open, glittering. Then, suddenly, she flung the door open and ran out.

It was dark on the landing and on the stairs. Neville Parwen heard her running upstairs, pattering, very fast. Listening, he put down the telephone. She was going to

the fellow's room to torment herself. No, she had passed that landing. Rushing, pattering footsteps.

Quickly he followed her, up a few stairs. Then he hesitated, listening. The pattering footsteps had stopped. Then he could hear stifled, panting sobs. She must be on the children's landing. He followed slowly. The stifled sobbing from above beat down on his very bowels, making him feel sick. He stopped again, to pull himself together, to get himself into a useful state.

The light of a lamp in the street faintly lit the stairs. As he was passing Summerest's door an impulse he couldn't resist, an impulse of urgent distaste, made him open it and switch on the light. It was a deserted room. He could not understand the fellow. Slinking away like this. Neville Parwen could understand physical cowardice. He could neither understand nor forgive such spiritual cowardice as Summerest's.

He went on, up the stairs. Lily Christine was quiet now. He could not hear a thing but the creaking of the stairs under him. The faint light of the street lamp did not reach so high, but he could just make her out. What was she doing, standing there by the door of the children's room? She seemed to be clinging to the door knob.

"Lily Christine!" he whispered.

She was crying, but now ever so quietly, and he was glad of the easy-flowing tears.

He went up the last short flight, the stairs creaking bitterly under him. Only when he was quite close to her did he see her face, unearthly white, turned to him, pleading.

"Nannie, don't let me go in! I'll only wake them."

The bright glittering eyes, bruised, beseeching, terrified. He could feel her terror coming in waves from her, the sudden overpowering terror of life.

"If I went in there," she whispered, "and said to

them, ' Your daddy has gone, and he doesen't want to see you any more '—Nappie, if they could understand, Timothy would die right off and Julia would hate me from that moment."

He took her arm, tried to lead her downstairs. She crumpled up against him.

" My heart's so queer ! " she whispered, and suddenly began giggling. " Well, what a life ! "

And before he could get an arm properly around her she collapsed at his feet.

" Ow ! " she said.

He was startled, bending anxiously over her.

" Quite safe, dear," she whispered reassuringly. " Sit down here—please do."

She was sitting on the top stair. He squeezed himself beside her.

" Sitting out," she whispered. She giggled. " Oh, very much out ! "

He felt like shivering ; it was chilly on the stairs. But she would not go down, not heeding him when he tried to persuade her. She sat pressed close to him, he could feel her slender body quivering against his arm, and her soft hair was pressed against his cheek.

" You've always been unbelievably kind to me," she whispered.

" We all love you, my angel."

" Oh, Nappie—all ! "

Anxiously he pressed her closer to him, afraid she was going to break down again.

" I'm quite calm now, really I am," she said.

" The best thing for you to do is to come home with me for the night. This house . . ."

" But how *can* I, with so much to do in the morning ? Don't worry about me, Nappie ; I'm all right now."

" What have you got to do in the morning ? "

"Well, *first* of all, send the children away to mother in the country. This is an unhappy house, dreadful things might happen at any moment in this house, and so they mustn't stay here another minute."

"And then?"

"And then—and then—well—darling, how do I know what I'll do then?"

"I know what I am going to do," he said with sudden decision.

She stirred uneasily against him.

"I'm going to Paris, to-morrow," he said.

"Oh no, Nappie! We mustn't bother him."

"Be blowed to bothering him! And, after all, I'm your first cousin and have a perfect right to an explanation."

She imagined Ivor "explaining." Bothered, bewildered, slow. But looking stern and purposeful, quite one of Kipling's Englishmen. The old cart-horse!

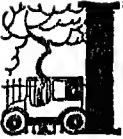
"You won't get anything out of him," she sighed.

"We'll see," he said grimly.

"Yes, we'll see," she whispered.

It seemed to do her good, sitting on the chilly stairs. They sat there a long time without a word. Then she went to bed quite calmly, and the next day, as there was no letter or message from Summercrest, Neville Parwen left for Paris by the evening train.

CHAPTER XI



IT happened that Harvey was very busy at this time, being kept late at the office, and so some days passed before he knew anything of Lily Christine's immediate fortunes. There may have been some idea at the back of his head, too, that he had seen too much of her of late, that he was inflicting his company on her. But he did not inquire too closely into that uncomfortable fancy, and anyhow he really was very busy.

When Muriel asked him for news of Lily Christine, how she was and what she was doing, he said he had had time neither to see her nor to ring her up. Muriel was surprised, and looked at him in an oddly ruminating way which he found rather annoying.

On the afternoon of the fifth day after the events related in the previous chapter, he heard Lily Christine's voice on the telephone asking him what had she done to deserve his desertion.

"Not," she said, "that I expect a busy man to come and see me more than once a week, but you might at least have rung me up to ask me how I was."

"And how are you?"

"It doesn't matter now; you are behind the times."

"Why, has so much as all that happened in the last few days?"

"Oh, you can't imagine how much! I'd like to see you, if you can spare any of your precious time."

"Don't say that, Lily Christine! It's only that I've been fancying you have seen quite enough of me lately."

"Rupert, what a silly thing to say! I didn't think it of you, really I didn't."

"Well, I promise not to be so petty in future."

"You can begin straight away by coming to see me this evening. I want to ask your advice about something."

Her voice was light and unconcerned; he thought it must be some little thing.

"Your advice," she said, "as a man of the world."

"Well, I've never been called *that* before, more's the pity!"

"It's about a letter I had this morning—such a very curious letter that I don't know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels. I suppose you know Ivor has gone?"

"But I was with you when he went to Paris!"

"I mean for ever, dear—'left' me is the way to put it, I think."

"Well!" said Harvey, dumbfounded.

"Yes, it *is* surprising. That evening you wouldn't have thought he was going for good, would you?"

That hesitating back in the doorway, ashamed. . . .

"Where's Parwen?" he asked after a pause.

"Paris. He should be back this evening sometime. How seriously he takes his responsibilities as my first cousin—bless him! What a world it is, isn't it? One so irresponsible and another so—adequate. And the irresponsible ones seem to get the best of everything. It *is* hard, Rupert, isn't it?"

"I simply can't get over it," Harvey said. "Running off like that!"

She gave a small laugh, which made him tingle with distress.

"You can't imagine what a conceited fool it has made me feel! For I did think, I was *positive*, he liked me. Shows a woman she must never take anything for granted."

He could not say anything, for distaste. And all he could think of from that moment until he stood at the door of the small narrow house in the small narrow street, was Summerest's clumsy, hesitating back. He kept on looking at the fellow's back hesitating in the doorway, ashamed.

Hempel opened the door, a thing that had never happened before. She welcomed him with a lugubrious smile.

“ Why, where's Coghill ? ”

“ Coghill, sir, has gorn, left us.”

So he had “ left ” us too, had he ? A charming pair. Here to-day, gone to-morrow. Modern marriage. The irresponsible swine.

In the familiar bedroom he found to his surprise that Lily Christine was in bed.

“ But you didn't tell me you weren't well ! ”

“ Oh, I'm quite well, really. It's only that my heart gets funny sometimes and I'm told to lie in bed to keep out of mischief.”

There were two others in the room, a tall man and a tall young woman, neither of whom Harvey had seen before. Lily Christine introduced the tall young woman as Mrs. Parwen. She was very handsome in a severe way, with dark, troubled eyes. Harvey felt she was troubled about things beyond his understanding. She had a pleasant, impersonal masculine voice. Harvey found her rather formidable.

As for Ambatriadi the Greek, he never was so surprised in his life. Ambatriadi was reading a letter in an absorbed way, and merely glanced up to shake hands with the newcomer. Harvey's met a hard, bony, restless hand. Now he had made a picture to himself of Ambatriadi the Greek as a shortish, sleek, dark man, very polished, very well dressed, suave and confident. To his resentment he

found himself looking up to—Harvey was a stooping sort of six foot—a very erect man of impatiently natural manners in an old tweed suit that was first-cousin to his own; a handsome man with a high, sensitive nose and tired, gentle brown eyes and a weathered, ravaged, haggard, ruined, and melancholy complexion.

The familiar bedroom looked cheerful in the firelight. There were no roses on the small table by the bed.

“Council of war,” Lily Christine smiled.

“Only Neville is missing,” Mrs. Parwen said in her pleasant masculine voice, “and he should be here soon.”

The bed was strewn with papers and books and note-paper. Lily Christine sitting propped up against a pile of cushions, with her largest spectacles on her nose and her curly hair running wild, looked like a studious schoolgirl who had been over-reading. She looked tired and wan, as though a long sleep would do her good. But there was a sort of fluttering gaiety about her too, not feverish or unreal, but fluttering, hovering, a pale light gaiety of spirit, the waxen-white gossamer flower on the barren tree of unhappiness. And she spoke quite lightly and naturally, but Harvey felt all the time that there was only a very small part of her in the room with them.

“You see, you have a companion for your dram-drinking at last,” she smiled at him as he helped himself to a drink.

Ambatriadi, standing near the overburdened desk, was still absorbed in reading the letter, while in his other hand he held a tumbler in which, as Harvey could see, the impertinence of soda water had been almost savagely limited. Harvey could have sworn that the man had long since finished reading the letter, and was now digesting it.

Mrs. Parwen sat in the arm-chair, looking thoughtfully into the fire. Her features were severely beautiful, and

her nostrils made Harvey think of race-horses. He had never read her poetry, but he fancied it must be mainly about the country and agriculture ; she looked as though she had no time to bother about little perishable things.

Harvey sat sideways at the foot of the bed.

“ How are Julia and Timothy in this awful weather ? Ours have got beastly colds.”

“ I’ve packed them off to mother in the country.”

“ And a good thing, too ! ” Mrs. Parwen said briskly.

She turned her dark troubled eyes to Harvey, and he saw how kind they were when they descended from their troubled heights.

“ I do wish,” she said, “ you would try to persuade Lily Christine to come and stay with Neville and me for a while. I can’t see any point in her staying alone here —particularly in this disheartening weather.”

“ Sonia, really I can’t, dear. I don’t know what it is, but I simply can’t stay with friends in London. Staying with them in the country is one thing, but in London in any other house but one’s own, one feels unusual, somehow as though every day was a Sunday.”

Harvey, understanding that, said nothing. Ambatriadi had at last finished with the letter, and was drinking thoughtfully.

“ Well, Andy ? What do you think ? ”

And on a sudden Lily Christine’s voice was full of hope, eager, quite different from the light, tentative voice in which she was saying everything that day.

To Harvey’s surprise the tall Greek did not answer, but merely shrugged his shoulders in an extraordinarily impatient way. Well !

“ Yes, it’s quite mad, isn’t it ? ” Lily Christine said, but now quite listlessly.

“ Herc,” said Ambatriadi abruptly, holding out the letter to Harvey.

"Yes, read it, Rupert," Lily Christine said listlessly.

While Harvey read the letter he could feel that Ambatriadi, without once looking at him, was taking a keen interest in what Americans call his "reaction" to it. There was something comical in the restless way Ambatriadi paced up and down; one could not resent it. One felt he was so worried, so disturbed about other people's troubles, and impatient to put them right. And one felt that his friend's gave him a very great deal of trouble, which could have been avoided but for their stupidity.

The letter was quite short, and in clear, capable handwriting.

"DEAR LILY CHRISTINE,

It isn't easy for me to write this letter. But I am afraid it has to be done. Of course you will understand that there can be no question of my ever coming back to you. All that is over, as you must have known it would be if ever I found out. I am afraid it will be no use trying to call this a misunderstanding. I could never write such a letter as this without the most definite proofs, and those were given to me only the other evening just before I left for Paris. I know I am not free from blame for the fact that our marriage has turned out to be an unhappy one. But never for a moment has it ever occurred to me that *you* could be anything but loyal in your affection for me and your love for our children. To find you haven't been is a great shock to me. I haven't yet quite decided what steps I shall take, but you will be informed in due course. In the meanwhile I shall stay on in Paris.

Ivor."

Harvey was so thunderstruck that he had to read several sentences time and again before he could feel

that he had even remotely understood what the fellow was driving at.

His back was half-turned to Lily Christine, and very glad he was of it. It was Ambatriadi's eye he wanted to catch first. He did not stop to ask himself how it was that he trusted the Greek to give of his best in friendship to Lily Christine.

He folded the letter up carefully, gaining time before he looked up. Somehow he did not associate Summerest with that letter. Such a letter seemed to have nothing to do with any man he had ever met. It was an idiotic wickedness committed by some impersonal unknown.

"Well?" Lily Christine asked listlessly.

But Harvey could not turn round to her, could not collect any sentences in his mind. He met Ambatriadi's tired brown eyes. The Greek was looking at him, as who should say: "Now what shall we tell her?"

"Fancy Ivor going mad!" Lily Christine sighed.

"He's not mad, far from it," Ambatriadi said hoarsely. He had a hoarse, smoky voice with a decidedly foreign intonation.

"Not mad? Then what is he?"

"I could tell you what he is," Ambatriadi said wearily, "in Greek."

"Rupert, tell me," she said.

Her voice sounded quite inattentive, as though she was thinking of other things. He did not look round at her, not knowing what to say.

"Is he or isn't he accusing me of something or other in that letter? And if so, what? I've read it until my head aches, and still I can't make out. Sonia!"

"Yes, dear?"

"You've read it. Is Ivor accusing me of something? Rupert, tell me, dear."

Harvey looked at Ambatriadi. Mrs. Parwen looked into the fire.

To his infinite surprise, when he at last turned to Lily Christine, she was smiling.

"Come on, Rupert—buck up, buck up! You are always saying or implying what a plain man you are. Now for a plain man's opinion!"

"Well, the point is," Harvey said slowly, "he hasn't written that letter at all."

"As though," she smiled, "I didn't know that! Ivor write such a letter!"

With an almost sinister sibilance Ambatriadi inhaled a terrifying quantity of smoke, as though his lungs were stupid and needed a good lesson.

"It's no good talking like that," he said impatiently.

Lily Christine smiled at him, dismissing him.

"You don't understand, Andy."

Harvey, looking at her, was utterly at a loss what to say. She had taken off her spectacles, and her eyes looked enormous, and so deep, so far-away, so clear yet unknowable. What was she thinking of?

"Of course Ivor never wrote that letter!" she said listlessly.

Harvey, quite helpless, looked at Ambatriadi. The Greek thoughtfully emptied his glass.

"Lily Christine," he said hoarsely, "don't make things more difficult by being . . . silly."

"Then tell me the truth?" she cried bitterly, startling Harvey.

Ambatriadi made a desperate, almost frantic, gesture, as though people in general were too much for him altogether.

"How can we tell you the truth, Lily Christine, when you at once begin making up fairy stories on your own?"

"But I believe in fairy stories, Andy!"

Ambatriadi looked as though he was suffering intensely and, what was worse, quite unnecessarily.

"Then don't ask us to tell you the truth," he said.

Sonia Parwen, who all this time had not taken her eyes from the fire, went to her and sat on the bed and took her hand.

"Sonia darling, now don't you begin being impatient with me."

"All I want to say, dear one, is that Mr. Harvey and old Andy mean that Ivor must have written that letter at the dictation of a lawyer."

Lily Christine laughed shakily.

"A lawyer's letter from Ivor to me, Sonia! To *me*!"

"The fellow!" snapped Ambatriadi in unspeakable disgust.

Lily Christine looked at him with a shaky, bewildered smile.

"What is it now, Andy!"

"The fellow! But I suppose it's no good abusing him."

Lily Christine turned her eyes from him listlessly, giving him up as a bad job.

"It doesn't matter," she said.

"It doesn't matter!" the Greek echoed hoarsely. "The fellow tramples on her and she says it doesn't matter!"

She looked at Ambatriadi bitterly, as though she hated him.

"Andy, please don't talk like that! Trample on me! Why should he, what is the point? Trample indeed! Why should he, what have I ever done to him?"

"Yes, it's all unbelievable." Sonia Parwen said slowly, holding her hand.

Lily Christine looked from one to the other of them, very gravely, then back to Mrs. Parwen.

" And so he wants a divorce—is that it ? Sonia ? "

" I'm afraid so dear."

" Well . . . but what I can't understand is, why didn't he say so ? Why didn't he tell me—instead of slinking away ? "

And she looked from one to the other of them, as though they were very wise and could tell her what was written in the stars.

" If he wants me to divorce him," she said slowly, watching them, " why, of course I will ! But why all this—nastiness and mystery ? "

And not one of them could tell her that Summerest's letter was not that of a man asking for a divorce but of one intending to divorce his wife. Larvey could not help glancing at the door, as though he expected to see Summerest's back, clumsy, hesitating, ashamed.

" I don't blame you for not saying anything," she sighed at last. " It's all so mysterious."

Ambatriadi struck a match sharply.

" Mrs. Abbey," he muttered.

Lily Christine smiled helplessly, as at a child's vagaries.

" Oh, she hasn't got anything to do with it, Andy, that's certain."

" Is it ? " Ambatriadi said hoarsely. " You'll see, Lily Christine."

Again she looked at him bitterly, angrily, as though he had no right to be probing into hidden, beastly places.

" Andy, of course she hasn't ! How could she ? "

" How ? Suppose she liked him ? "

They were like two children squabbling.

" Well, she doesn't—not like that."

He laughed hoarsely. A prickly Bacchus, that was what he was. Prickly, smoky, hoarse, jerky.

" She told you, I suppose ? "

" Yes, she did. And I'd rather kill myself than go

around thinking everybody is telling me lies. Why, she said he hadn't even said good-bye to her before leaving!"

"Well, we'll see," Ambatriadi said, wearily enough. And he looked at Lily Christine anxiously, as though he would have liked to say something very much to the point but was fearful how she would take it.

"Better be going," Harvey said vaguely.

Ambatriadi kissed Lily Christine's hand with extraordinary gentleness.

"Don't mind me, Lily Christine. I'll tell you a thing —I'm a most incompetent ass, but I mean well. Now Harvey and I will leave you alone to rest."

"But, Andy, before you go—what does he mean in that awful letter about 'proofs'? Proofs of *what*, Andy?"

"We will know more when Neville comes," Sonia Parwen said hastily. "Won't you wait for him, Mr. Harvey?"

But Harvey wanted to go; it was so difficult to stay there not knowing what to say to Lily Christine.

As they went she said, smiling: "I'm so glad you two like each other."

Outside, it was raining, not much but just drearily dribbling on and on.

"I live at the Hyde Park Hotel," said Ambatriadi, striding along.

Harvey said that was his way, too. They strode on in silence, obliquely crossing the wide, unsympathetic expanse of Belgrave Square. It always depressed Harvey, with its fat, blank, squatting richness. Ambatriadi did not hesitate in crossing the square, striding on without looking to right or left. He had no overcoat. The taxis made a greasy, slurring noise round the glistening curves.

Then they came into Knightsbridge, among the crowds. Harvey noticed that, although they were both tall men,

they were both inclined to give way to the crowd, to be shoved into the gutter. A couple of incapables.

He was glad of the Greek's silence. He felt positive that Ambatriadi had something in his mind to tell him of Mrs. Abbey, and he did not want to hear it. Why drag Mrs. Abbey into this? She was no concern of theirs.

He could not get that letter out of his head. Summerest accusing his wife of adultery. That was what it came to. Summerest daring to accuse her of anything! It was impossible to imagine a sane person sitting down to write a letter so silly and at the same time so wicked. Harvey could not understand it. The fellow was weak enough, but he was not the plotting, calculating sort. He could not understand it.

At the steps of the hotel entrance Ambatriadi said : "Coming in?"

It was half-past seven. Muriel would be wondering where on earth he was. Well, he was wondering, too. Where on earth were any of them in this upside-down world?

He vaguely followed the Greek up the steps into the hotel, then up the broad stairway into the lobby.

"Just a moment," Ambatriadi said, "while I order some oysters for Lily Christine. She won't feel like eating in the state she is in, but she might swallow."

Harvey wondered, now why did he never think of such things? Little attentions, kindnesses. He supposed it came of being English. The English instinctively had a contempt for the way foreigners tried to please women, with flowers and little attentions; they said that foreigners were up to their tricks again, trying to get something. But an ordinarily kind man ought to think of such things, the little things that give pleasure. Still, one was born with that sort of thoughtfulness or one wasn't. It never

would come naturally to him any more than to Soames Forsyte.

Waiting, he wondered if Neville Parwen would bring back some sane news from Paris. But Parwen would be no match for Summerest's spidery oppression. Parwen was another incapable, no good at shoving. Fine, useful friends they were for Lily Christine, the three of them, three incapables, waiting to be shoved aside by the men who knew their minds.

Ambatriadi came back, and they went up in the lift. Harvey fancied it must be the top floor at which they got out. Then they walked quite a long way, and at the end of a passage Ambatriadi opened a door.

"Daisy!" he said, in his hoarse, smoky, foreign voice.

They were in a sitting-room, and there was a door ajar leading into a bedroom. Daisy! Harvey was surprised and displeased. He had not bargained for a woman, a Daisy. What next! Did the fellow keep a girl up here?

But Daisy did not come immediately. It was an unusually comfortable and homely sitting-room for a hotel, with heavy arm-chairs in chintz, and a cheerful fire burning. The windows must look over the park. A bright room it must be on a fine day, and brighter than most even in this wretched November weather, with the park beneath one. There was nothing personal in it, not so much as a photograph.

A manservant, very dark, "Mediterranean," looking rather as Harvey had once imagined Ambatriadi the Greek must look, came in with two cocktails on a tray.

They were the palest looking cocktails Harvey had ever seen.

"Martinis, very dry," Ambatriadi explained.

Harvey did not want one, but took it to save trouble. He put it down again quickly enough. It was almost neat gin.

Ambatriadi, sipping his, paced about restlessly.

" You heard what she said ? Harvey ? "

" What about ? "

Certainly he was a most impatient man, forever startling one with abrupt gestures indicating that the world was an intolerably stupid place. But at the same time you felt the spirit of kindness so eager and so anxious in him that you did not resent his jerky ways.

" Mrs. Abbey," he said impatiently. " You heard what the poor girl said about her ? "

Harvey said nothing. What he wanted to say was : " Oh, shut up about Mrs. Abbey ! "

Ambatriadi gulped down his cocktail and slapped the glass down on a table.

" Lily Christine," he said very hoarsely, " said that Mrs. Abbey hadn't even seen the fellow to say good-bye to before he left."

" Well ? "

" Well ! I'll tell you a thing, Harvey—it's a lie."

A wave of acute discomfort swept over Harvey. Drat the fellow !

Ambatriadi said : " I was playing bridge that evening at a house in Regent's Park—Sandringham Terrace—and as I walked out I saw Summercrest pass in a taxi."

" What time ? "

" Oh, about seven. Where would he have been going but to Mrs. Abbey's ? She lives round there."

Yes, it must have been a little before seven when Summercrest left the familiar bedroom. And again Harvey saw the fellow's back, clumsy, hesitating, ashamed. So he had gone to see Mrs. Abbey, had he ? . . .

" I really don't see why you make such a point of it," he said uncomfortably.

" He doesn't see ! " And Ambatriadi interlocked his fingers nervously as though doing his best to restrain them

from throttling Harvey. "What did he say in his confounded letter? That the 'proofs'—whatever the fellow means—had been given to him that evening just before he left for Paris. And who gave them to him—shoved them at him? Would he have got them for himself? Does Summerest strike you as a man who could employ enquiry-agents? Who would, then? And he says he doesn't see!"

"And I don't see," Harvey said stubbornly. "All I can see is that you can have no possible justification for such an accusation against a woman like Mrs. Abbey."

The Greek swept him away wearily.

"Oh, leave me alone! Justification!"

"But it really won't do, Ambatriadi. Mrs. Abbey is looked up to as a very good sort of woman, and here you come along out of the blue and—"

"Yes, yes!" Ambatriadi stopped him wearily. "Yes, I know. Of course. Rule Britannia. Queen Victoria. Florence Nightingale. Gilbert and Sullivan. Joynson Hicks. Mrs. Abbey. Buy British Goods. Yes, yes!"

He paced about, looking very weary and haggard.

"Unfortunately," he said hoarsely, "Mrs. Abbey is only an imitation."

"It takes some believing," Harvey muttered.

"Believe it or not, my friend," the Greek said indifferently.

But there was profound melancholy in Ambatriadi's air that had more destructive effect on Harvey's defence of Mrs. Abbey than any amount of aggressive arguments.

"I've known Helen Abbey," Ambatriadi said, quite calmly, "for twenty years. Ever since she was a shop-girl with a Lancashire accent."

"I never knew she had been a shop-girl!"

"Very few people do."

"A wonderful career, say what you like. So she was in a shop ! And then ? "

"Then ? Well, I happened to know a manager-fellow and he gave her a job."

"Then I suppose," Harvey said doubtfully, "you know her well."

Ambatriadi, pacing about, turned down the corners of his mouth in what may have been a smile.

"No one on earth knows that woman well, Harvey."

"But do you mean to tell me that in all that time you have known no good of her ? "

Ambatriadi, with the utmost difficulty, restrained a gesture of intense resignation.

"Who said I hadn't, my friend ? Do you think I am saying beastly things about her for fun ? Do you think I enjoy saying beastly things about anyone ? "

"No, I can't say I do," Harvey had to say.

"Well ! All I am trying to do—as you are fond of Lily Christine—is to show you the sort of woman she is up against. I don't deny that Mrs. Abbey is a good woman—"

"Oh, don't you ! "

"—as the world understands good women. I don't deny she has done and does many kindnesses, that she is a pattern of virtue. All I say is that she is the craftiest woman I have ever known."

Confound the fellow ! What a way he had of choosing sticky words.

"Then what is your point about all this ? " Harvey asked uncomfortably. "How do you mean that Lily Christine is 'up against' Mrs. Abbey ? "

"It looks as if she will marry Summcrest—doesn't it ? "

"You mean, if Lily Christine divorces him ? "

"I mean," the Greek snapped angrily, "if he divorces her."

"Well, I can't believe it," said Harvey flatly. And he did not. "People aren't so bad as you make out, Ambatriadi. Whatever Mrs. Abbey may be, Summerest is no more than a weak fool."

"Yes, yes! Of course the fellow isn't actively bad—who could be actively bad or actively anything who, once he has passed the age of eight, is willing to spend three consecutive days of his life standing with ten others in a field looking for a small leather ball? Of course he isn't bad. But a fellow like that can be *made* bad, good, or indifferent."

"Oh, rubbish! Men aren't put up to such things."

"What about that letter for a beginning?"

"Yes, that's not pretty—certainly. A streak of madness."

"Whenever one of you Englishmen does a thing that's unbelievably caddish—the others call it a streak of madness."

"I'm afraid you are anti-English, Ambatriadi."

"I'm anti-cad—English, French, or double-Dutch. I'll tell you a thing, Harvey—men do queer things for women like Mrs. Abbey."

"*La femme fatale!* Fiction stuff, Ambatriadi. I'm surprised at you."

"If I'm not mistaken," the Greek said wearily, "you will be surprised at everything when Summerest begins divorcing his wife with a view to marrying Mrs. Abbey."

"But good God, man, don't you see what rubbish you are talking! They both know as well as we do that Lily Christine could never have been unfaithful to him—while he is known to have had dozens of mistresses."

"What is the good of talking like that, Harvey? No amount of equalizing laws will ever make people judge men and women equally as regards adultery. Besides, the fellow has a great name as a sportsman. I've been to an

English school, remember. Eminence in any game has a great pull in influencing opinion in any country that talks a lot about fair play."

"Oh, damn eminence in any game! You foreigners have some queer ideas about England, Ambatriadi. What I say and what I believe is that those two must *know* that Lily Christine could never have had a lover."

"He knows, yes. But she doesn't."

"If you're trying to imply that Mrs. Abbey shares your nasty foreign suspiciousness——"

"You're anti-foreign, Harvey."

"Yes, I am."

"Good. Every honest Englishman is. It's the semi-cultured, demi-cosmopolitan, half-castrated, tolerant foreign-loving Englishman that makes me sick. We've had plenty of them in Greece, I can tell you. Jellyfish with projecting teeth. But I'll tell you a thing about Mrs. Abbey, Harvey—she hates women like Lily Christine. She has no mercy on them. She thinks they ought to be stamped out as useless and—and bad. Perhaps Lily Christine *is* useless. The poor girl certainly can't earn a living. Personally, I like useless people. You would too, if you lived in a republic. But Mrs. Abbey hates and despises the lot of them—all the so-called smart young people. And she is ready to believe the worst of them. Listen to me carefully, Harvey. I know what I'm talking about. Mrs. Abbey has got hold of something about Lily Christine that *looks* bad. Obviously. But she wouldn't make Summerrest divorce her if she thought Lily Christine was innocent. In that sense Mrs. Abbey is a good woman. But her mind is built in such a way that she believes Lily Christine is guilty. And she will have no mercy. That's Mrs. Abbey's character—and you can take it or leave it. Maud!" The name was called hoarsely at the half-open bedroom door.

It gave Harvey a turn.

"I say, Ambatriadi, do you keep a harem in your bedroom, or what?"

The question aroused the tall Greek from his absorption. Then his handsome, ruined face broke into one of the pleasantest smiles Harvey had ever seen. The man was no more than a troubled anxious, thwarted child.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I do it quite unconsciously. Habit."

The "Mediterranean" valet came in with two "very dry" Martinis. Harvey refused his.

"Every evening," Ambatriadi explained, looking rather shamefaced, "I have three dry Martinis before dressing for dinner. And for years now they have been known to all my friends—barmen mostly, I'm afraid—as Daisy, Maud, and Robinson. Sorry to have startled you. You mean to say you are not taking Maud?"

"I'm afraid I must be going home. I'm late already."

"I thought of asking you to come to a play with me. We might do without dinner and have supper afterward. What about going to see Mrs. Abbey's rubbish?"

Harvey suddenly fancied he would like to see Mrs. Abbey again in the light of Ambatriadi's "allegations." He left immediately to go home and change. Muriel, as a journalist's wife, was used to erratic movements. When, by half-past eight, he was back again to pick up Ambatriadi, he heard, as he approached the door, the hoarse, smoky voice calling for Robinson.

The play in which Mrs. Abbey was drawing crowded houses was one of those polite melodramas of misunderstanding that flatter people into thinking that, in spite of appearances, all is well with the world. For all the relation it had to life as it is lived by the majority of human beings it might have been written by someone who lived as unreal a life as that of a dramatic critic. It was trivial

and false, but was well constructed and played with that well-mannered conviction and blank-faced "naturalness" which are nowadays the only stock-in-trade of the most credulous and the most self-satisfied profession in England. Harvey would often find himself sighing for a good, hearty, ranting actor of the "old school," which of course meant that the dear old boy had never been to school at all and didn't pretend he had, whereas it seemed to be the dearest ambition of these cigarette-smoking loungers on the contemporary stage to be taken for public-school men and scratch golfers.

Mrs. Abbey's part was that of the popular young wife of a brilliant politician who had been foolish enough to let himself be lured into the toils of an adventuress. And this adventuress was all but ruining the brilliant but guileless fellow, indeed she had as good as ruined him, when in stepped the "innate good sense" and the "sound, practical clear-sightedness" of the British race in the beautiful form of Mrs. Abbey. For what did the politician's wife do but get the guileless fellow back by pretending to have a lover of her own, and very prettily she pretended, so that all the time the audience knew that she was a good woman and incapable of having any such thing as a lover. But naturally the brilliant politician thought she really was deceiving him, and when he thought he caught her at it there was a grand row at the end of the second act.

In the ordinary way Harvey would have enjoyed the stupid situation and complications and falsities as making-up an entertainment with which living people had only the remotest concern. But Ambatriadi was a nervous companion to sit beside, the way he kept on spasmodically folding and unfolding his hands. Not that his face, with his fine, high nose stuck in the air, looked anything but absolutely solemn. His manners were too nice to show

he thought the play was tosh, the actors cheats to be taking money on false pretences, the managers gaol birds, the audience fools, and the critics scoundrels for having sent them there.

Harvey, looking at the radiantly beautiful woman on the stage, listening to the gracious kindly voice which raised the daft lines of the play and the ignoble smugness of the story to a plane of decency, found himself unable any longer to think seriously of Mrs. Abbey as a plotter against another woman's happiness. He lapsed into a state of vacancy about all that, unwilling to think of it one way or the other. There she was, Mrs. Abbey, with her natural, unspoilt kindliness—and then there was the woman created by Ambatriadi's murky Mediterraneanism, the woman who was obsessing a man and getting him into guilty depths. No, it wouldn't do ; the combination wouldn't work. The world was a funny place, certainly, but not as bad as that.

He was glad when at last the play was over. The theatre was very full, and as they tried to get out Harvey noticed with faint amusement how they were both of them being continually shoved aside by smaller men. Ambatriadi's impatience was all in his manner ; actually he would not hurt a fly. At last they got out. It struck damp and chilly in the chaotic street. They managed to extricate themselves from the crowds around the entrance, being continually shoved aside by people waiting for motor-cars.

" Shall we go in and see her ? " Ambatriadi asked suddenly, striding on.

He couldn't mean Mrs. Abbey ! But he did. Well, why not ? What a comic day this was !

Ambatriadi turned into a dark narrow passage, toward the end of which was a lighted doorway.

" We'll get a drink, anyway," he said. He chuckled

hoarsely. "Mrs. Abbey has had two failures in her life—she couldn't stop Abbey and me drinking."

"Abbey drank like a fish too, did he?"

"Well, he was a friend of mine."

"Good fellow?"

"I'll tell you a thing—Abbey was the best fellow in the world."

Outside the stage door, the fireman was talking to a friend. Inside, they could not at once approach the stage door-keeper's box because of a young lady who was in the way, talking to the man in the box. Her back was to them, and all Harvey could see of her was a tight black hat and a fur coat and long slender legs. The long slender legs seemed familiar, somehow. But how could they be familiar? How silly it was of him to think he recognized them. Wasn't this a generation of long slender legs, and here he was fancying he recognized someone by a glance at a pair.

The stage-door man in his box put down a telephone.

"She's afraid she's engaged and can't see you," he said to the young lady with the long slender legs.

"But I *must* see her, please—it's important!"

"Lily Christine!" Harvey said.

She started round, her eyes fluttering. She had no spectacles on, so she blinked and peered a little before taking them in.

"Well!" She laughed nervously. She was very white, bloodless, waxen white. She must have forgotten to touch her cheeks with rouge before coming out. What was she up to, in such a hurry?

"Andy, Rupert! Here I am, you see."

And Harvey suddenly, in a flash, had quite a new picture of Lily Christine. There she was, a swift-moving reckless, white-faced young woman, the very incarnation

of youth, fearless and intent, charged with purpose. Behold, a new Lily Christine ! And how lovely she was, with a heedless, white staring loveliness. Ave Lily Christine !

A new lamp had been lit. He recognized her. And he was filled with a trembling gladness. He would die for her. Yes, he would.

"What are you doing out of bed ?" Ambatriadi was asking hoarsely.

She took no notice of his question ; she was intent getting at what she wanted. And a couple of incapables in front of her. God, if only they could do something for her !

"Andy, I *must* see Mrs. Abbey, please. Now. Can you manage it ?"

Harvey trembled in his very soul. Were they going to fail her ? For he and Ambatriadi were one. There was no difference between them but the most trifling difference between men ever invented by men to fill hell with damned heroes, that of nationality. They were one. He knew now that Ambatriadi loved her, too. Of course he did. He would. Another romantic fool.

Ambatriadi said hoarsely : "Of course. Why not ?"

Harvey thought : "Bless him ! Wonderful man."

"Sorry, Mr. Ambatriadi," the stage-door man said. "Mrs. Abbey says she's engaged."

Lily Christine tapped on the bare boards with her foot. So this was Lily Christine too, this intent, white-faced woman, without fear and without resignation.

Her fine shoes were splashed with mud.

"You walked here ?" Harvey asked, stupidly.

"Yes."

And he saw her walking, this new Lily Christine, swiftly with long strides, her head high, white and defiant, cutting through the crowds.

Ambatriadi said to the stage-door man : " Give me the telephone, George."

The stage-door man put the telephone on the ledge of his box and, absently chewing the end of a dirty yellow pencil, got through to Mrs. Abbey's dressing-room.

" Mr. Ambatriadi," he announced into the telephone, and gave the receiver to Ambatriadi.

" Helen ? Yes, Andy. I want to see you—yes, now. What ? I'll tell you a thing, Helen—I *must* see you. What ? All right then, I'll come up straight away."

He put the receiver down.

" All right, sir ? " the stage-door man said.

" Yes. Come on, Lily Christine. Harvey, I'll be down in a minute."

" Take the lift, sir ? " the stage-door man said, looking after them absently.

Lily Christine strode into the lift as though it was a long street, very swiftly, with long strides. They disappeared.

Harvey stood staring at nothing. A new lamp had been lit. He was afraid, and also he was filled with a trembling gladness.

Then, almost immediately, Ambatriadi was down again.

" Hello ! " said Harvey, interrupted, displeased.

Ambatriadi chuckled hoarsely.

" I knocked—and Lily Christine went in instead of me. Swung into the room—like a soldier of fortune."

He was in a dangerous mood, ready to play the devil. A Bacchus, prickly with angry jests.

" Did you see her ? " Harvey asked.

" Helen Abbey ? A glimpse. The devil, you should have seen her face ! Then I shut the door on them."

" I suppose we had better wait, hadn't we ? "

" Yes. Let's get out into the air. The atmosphere of stage doors is poison to me. Good night, George."

"Good night, Mr. Ambatriadi," said the stage-door man, absently chewing the end of his pencil and glancing sideways at Harvey as though to say what a card the tall foreigner was.

A few gallcry girls had collected outside the stage door. Pale, puffy, awed, giggling faces. They stared at Ambatriadi, thinking he was an actor. Harvey grinned at Ambatriadi's furious expression.

They went a little way from the stage door, paced up and down the dark passage.

"She must have heard something," Harvey said.

He thought of her white, intent face. The lithe, swift-moving figure unconscious of everything but a purpose. He had seen her soul this night. And her soul was without fear and without resignation.

But her shoes were splashed with mud. That was the devil of it—mud got you somewhere, wasn't at all awed by your clean, proud soul. Damn your soul!" said mud.

Ambatriadi said: "Parwen must have got back and told her who is at the back of it all."

"Do you think it was wise to let her see her?"

"Wise! How do I know what's wise or foolish when she asks me to do anything?"

The romantic fool! Oh, the chuckle-headed romantic fool! A pair of them.

"Yes. All the same, I'm worried about her in there."

Ambatriadi laughed hoarsely. The Bacchus, prickly with angry jests.

"Let's hope she gives Helen Abbey a black eye. After all, only butterflies see red."

"Butterflies see red? What on earth do you mean?"

"Only butterflies see red, I'm telling you. In Europe, that is."

"*Delirium tremens*, Ambatriadi!"

"On the contrary, natural history. Bees can't distinguish red from blue. I'm telling you, butterflies are the only non-tropical insects that can see red."

"Oh, I see!"

"That's a bright boy. God, I'm thirsty!"

"You drink a sight too much, Ambatriadi."

"Oh, leave me alone!"

From ten yards away they saw Lily Christine come out of the stage door. She came swinging out, scattering the gallery girls. They stared after her—pale, puffy, awed giggling faces.

She looked so tall, coming at them with long, swift strides. Right at them she came, white face, absorbed eyes, swinging down the passage, her fur coat as brave as a soldier's cloak. Of course she did not see them until she was almost on top of them.

They stared at her, waiting. But she scarcely noticed them, scarcely stopped.

"Oh, you waited! Well, I must go. Good night."

Cold, white, absorbed. And she walked on swiftly. They almost had to run after her. A pair of incapables. Using feet to catch an angel.

"No, don't come with me."

"We'll put you into a taxi," Ambatriadi said hoarsely.

"No, I want to walk."

"She'll be run over," Ambatriadi whispered hoarsely. "Blind as a bat."

Then they were out of the narrow passage, on the crowded pavement. She striding ahead, they trailing after her. A fine, useful couple.

Suddenly she turned, but still in flight, poised there. And her face was a cold white shadow, most beautiful.

"Rupert, I must see you to-morrow. Good night, Andy, thank you, dear. No, please don't come with me. I want to be alone."

She went. They stared after her, as though waiting for something to happen. The tall, slender, swift figure swept past the people on the pavements. There was something inexpressibly gallant and proud and solitary about her. The grim, soiled London night touched her with reverence. Men and women looked round at her as she passed by. *Ave, Lily Christine!* *Vale, Lily Christine!*

CHAPTER XII

FTER Harvey and Ambatriadi had left Lily Christine's bedroom earlier that evening, she and Sonia Parwen had settled down to await Parwen's coming. His train should be in at Victoria at any moment now.

But suddenly Lily Christine felt she could not bear to lie still another moment, she must be up, do something.

"Lily Christine you are not getting up! You mustn't, dear!"

No, she could not stay in bed another moment. She must use her limbs, be active. She ran the bath furiously, and was suddenly very busy with many little things. Ilempel, hearing the bath running, came clattering upstairs. But Lily Christine sent her away again; she wanted to manage by herself.

She was in the bath when she heard Nannie come in, and she called through the door that she would be out in a moment. But she did not hurry. She lay in the bath, among slow, wintry thoughts. Ah, the winter had set in, the winter of her life. She lay in the bath, her thoughts moving slowly in the wilderness, like brooding explorers.

Of course she had known all along the meaning of that skulking, hateful letter. Oh, Ivor, Ivor, what funny places he got himself into!

She felt calm, strong, when she thought of Ivor. She was the grown up one. Ivor, Ivor, fancy writing that hateful, lying letter! What agony of mind he must be passing through, what suffering and despair and self-repulsion!

No, she must not turn against him because he had blundered into lying and cruelty. But when she thought of Mrs. Abbey, a burning anger lit her mind. For she knew that Mrs. Abbey was at the back of this. And she thought of Mrs. Abbey with a steadily burning anger, surprised at her own calmness. So she loved Ivor, did she, and wanted him. Well, she could have him, but not in this pilfering way. Let them marry, she and Ivor, but she must not destroy his soul in this way. No, she must not be allowed to. What she was doing was unspeakably sinful, and she must be told how sinful it was. She must be stopped.

She could see Ivor, heavy and helpless as a sack of flour, being pushed into cruelty. Oh, Mrs. Abbey must be a bad woman, to hurt the man she loved. For whom did she hurt but Ivor, by making him so false to himself? No, she must not be allowed to do this in this beastly way.

It was funny that she could not think at all clearly about herself, of what she would do, of her life without Ivor. What an empty life it would be, nothing to worry about. How strange it would be, and oh, how bad for Julia and Timothy to be brought up in a broken home. Really, mothers and fathers were incredibly mean and selfish, the way they bothered about their loves and passions and had no fundamental sense of responsibility to the children they brought into the world. Divorced parents, puzzled babies. One didn't educate children, one puzzled them; that's what it came to. What a shame it was. Still, it wouldn't be so bad for Julia and Timothy, because she and Ivor couldn't help remaining the best of friends. Old Timothy, how puzzled he would be by all this messing about. But she must not think of Timothy's gentle, adoring attitude to his daddy. She must be calm. So she thought of Mrs. Abbey and worked herself up to a cold anger. Mrs. Abbey was in

for something anyhow, though she didn't quite know what as yet. That Mrs. Abbey.

Then, wrapped in a dressing-gown, she went into the bedroom.

"Well, Nappie dear?"

He was surprised that she was not "rattled," that she was quite natural. Dear Nappie, always trying to mask his hurts, trying to hide away behind his quivering gentlemanliness, so that sometimes when you wanted his sympathy most of all he seemed cold and almost inhuman.

"I don't quite know what to say, Lily Christine, I saw him, of course."

"Was he surprised to see you?"

"Surprised!" He laughed angrily. "He didn't show anything. I fancy he didn't notice me for quite a long time."

"Yes, he gets like that. It's his way of hiding."

"He said he had written to you."

Lily Christine glanced at Sonia and smiled. Then she pointed to the letter on the bed.

"Such a helpful letter!" she said.

He picked it up. Impassive Nappie. She went to the looking-glass to comb her hair. She saw Nappie's reflection drop the letter as though it had soiled his fingers.

Sonia was still in the arm-chair by the fire. Lily Christine lit a cigarette and sat on the arm. Sonia thoughtfully made the fire blaze up, and presently the glow got uncomfortably hot on Lily Christine's bare legs, but she did not notice for a long time.

"Well, Nappie! Did he happen to mention what all this nonsense is about?"

But she knew Nappie and she knew Ivor, so she knew that Nappie could really tell her nothing about Ivor. A

diplomat and a sack of flour, that was what they were together. And how could a diplomat deal with a sack of flour? All he could do would be to look at it helplessly, walk all round it, be disgusted, and walk away to cope with manageable things like men and nations. Poor old Nappie. Trying to get sense out of a sack of flour.

"Do you know," he was saying helplessly, "it was as much as I could do to get a word out of him. And I'm positive he didn't hear more than a word or two of what I said."

Lily Christine sat staring into the fire.

"Sack of flour," she said.

"What's that, dear?" Sonia asked.

"Yes, a sack of flour," Parwen said, as though relieved to hear it. "Exactly. No doing anything with him in that mood. Punch him all you like and you . . ."

Lily Christine, staring into the fire, smiled. Nappie punching Ivor. What next!

"So you told him what you thought of him, did you, Nappie?"

"What was the good? I don't think he was listening. All the time he seemed quite taken up with something just out of eyesight."

Yes, she could see him so clearly, blundering toward the unknown. The old cart-horse, trampling, blundering, trampling, blundering.

"But he must have told you *something*!" Sonia said.

"I got him to lunch at a quiet place, Foyot's. By the way, the French have gone mad, the prices they are charging. Well, there we were, and I couldn't get a word out of him until we had finished—and then he suddenly spoke for about five minutes on end——"

"Not looking at you once, I'll bet," Lily Christine said. "The stern profile."

"Yes, there he sat—talking—yet as though I wasn't

there. It was ghastly. Lily Christine, does he often get like that?"

"Sometimes, when he is ashamed."

"Ashamed! I must say I didn't get any impression of that. What I did get was that he was repeating a lesson he had got by heart."

"Heart!" Lily Christine smiled. "Funny!"

"It's wonderful that you are so calm, dear, I can't tell you how relieved I am."

"Yes, I'm quite calm. What did he say, exactly, Nappie?"

"Well," Parwen said doubtfully. He looked anxiously at his wife to help him, but she, like Lily Christine, was staring into the fire. He felt indescribably clumsy.

"He seemed quite decided," he said helplessly. "In fact, he said once that his mind was quite made up."

"To divorce me?" Lily Christine said.

Parwen looked at her anxiously, yet with great relief. How wonderful she was, to be so calm.

"Yes, dear."

Lily Christine, staring at the fire, thoughtfully passed her hand up and down her bare leg.

"But for a wife to be divorced," she said slowly, "doesn't she have to do something . . . ?"

"Yes," he said uncomfortably.

To his surprise Lily Christine began chuckling.

"I wouldn't put it beyond Ivor," she said, "to ask me to have a lover just to help him out."

Sonia Parwen said: "Exactly why is he making this vile exhibition of himself, Nappie? If he wants to be free why doesn't he go about it in the usual way and let Lily Christine divorce him?"

"He said the woman he wants to marry will have nothing to do with a man who has been divorced."

Mrs. Parwen asked Lily Christine : " Have you any idea who she is ? "

Lily Christine, staring into the fire, did not answer. Mrs. Abbey could keep. Mrs. Abbey was her own private business.

" Well, Nappie ? " she said.

He paced about restlessly, trying to think how best to put the beastly thing.

" He has got hold of some cock-and-bull story. You know, Lily Christine, I really do think he must be off his head."

" What is the story, dear ? "

" It's so incredible ! " he said helplessly. " And yet somehow all pieced together in a damnable way."

Lily Christine smiled into the fire. Nappie's high voice could be very funny when he was indignant.

" Has he had detectives after me, Nappie ? "

" Heaven only knows what he has had after you, the whole thing is so incredible ! He looks lost, blotted out—and at the same time he sits there saying vile things with his confounded profile. Quite calmly, mind you. And for all the notice he took of anything I said—I mightn't have been there ! "

" What is his cock-and-bull story ? " Lily Christine asked patiently.

Parwen took a desperate turn about the room.

" It's difficult to tell you, it's so abominable and—idiotic. And at the same time it all somehow . . . fits in."

" Fits in ! " Sonia said, disgusted.

" Yes, somehow. I mean, witnesses and all. It's about Harvey."

Lily Christine turned from the fire then, stricken.

" Nappie ! "

He simply could not meet her eyes.

"He wouldn't listen to a word I said," he said helplessly.

"Oh!" she whispered. "Poor Rupert! Nannie, it's not true! it can't be!"

"I'm afraid it is, Lily Christine. It was simply no good talking to him. A sack of flour. He just went on about you and poor Harvey and his proofs. Proofs!"

Lily Christine's blood came rushing to her face in a tempest of anger.

"I never heard of anything so mean!" she cried. "Dragging that poor harmless man into our wretched messes! And his nice wife and children. Nannie, I can't believe it. Oh, what's happened to Ivor!"

"I tell you, dear, I believe he has gone mad."

"This plotting and lying and heartlessness. Dragging a nice man and a dear friend into *this*!" Her voice was high with scorn. "It's about that night I spent there, I suppose? It can't be anything else."

At his helpless nod her angry scorn found vent in a kind of laugh.

"We must put a stop to it at once, that's all," she said in a queer hard voice, startling her friends.

"I'm afraid it won't be quite so easy as that, dear."

"Easy!" She laughed contemptuously. "Why, putting aside the indecency of trying to entangle Rupert in such a mess—it's all too ridiculous even to argue about. I never heard of such an idiotic story. Rupert Harvey as the co-respondent in the Summerest divorce case! Nannie, it's—laughable!"

"Yes," Parwen said miserably, looking at his wife as though to say: "She doesn't know the worst of it yet."

"The messy silliness of it!" Lily Christine said in that new hard voice. "I don't mind Ivor trying his tricks on me, but he is not going to hurt my friends. I'm beginning to agree with you, Nannie, that he *must* have

gone off his head. There's a maddening imbecility about picking on Rupert Harvey of all people that makes me see red. Why, I'd never set eyes on him until that evening, and Ivor knows it. Even the servants at Rupert's house can——"

"That's just what the servants can't do," Parwen said wretchedly.

Lily Christine stared at him, wide-eyed, unbelieving. "Nappie, *what* did you say?"

He looked at the points of his shoes, masked, impassive. It was simply too shabby a thing to meet with ordinarily human impatience.

"All the servants knew," he said, quite impersonally, "was that a strange young lady arrived for dinner and the night—on the only night Mrs. Harvey was away."

"But Nappie!" she gasped. "How do you know all that?"

"Oh, he has it all, dear," he said wearily. "Apparently all the—evidence—is down and signed and countersigned by lawyers and Heaven-knobs-what."

Lily Christine was quiet now. She stood staring at him. She looked profoundly thoughtful.

"You mean," she said at last, "that there really is a—case against Rupert?"

"Starrilaw happened to be travelling back with me. I gave him the main points, without names of course. I'm afraid he thought it was a strong case."

John Starrilaw, an intimate friend of theirs, was senior partner of a great firm of lawyers specializing in divorce.

Lily Christine was very still staring into the fire.

Parwen said: "Everything that night seems to have fallen out in a perfectly damnable way!"

"Yes, the singer of God," Lily Christine murmured. She was very still, profoundly thoughtful.

Sonia Parwen glanced at her husband as though to say

he had said enough for the time being. But he was too worried, he did not heed her.

"It's no good going into the wretched story now," he said. "But one point—and not their strongest one—is that as the two maids went upstairs to bed they saw Harvey come out of the room you were sleeping in."

Sonia Parwen sighed.

"Yes," Lily Christine said absently. "I asked him in to give me a cigarette."

Her fault, her fault. She not only failed in her own life but entangled other people in her failures. A nice friend to have.

"When I told him what vile nonsense it all was," Parwen said, "and that it could be cleared up in five minutes' conversation between you two—he answered as calmly as you please that he was going to stay abroad and not see you until the divorcee was on."

Lily Christine seemed to be quite unmoved, staring into the fire.

"Of course," she said absently. "He's frightened to see me. It's natural."

"Natural! Lily Christine, you really are too weak about the man. I half believe you would take him back even now."

"Perhaps. Whatever we say or do or think—in the end we all do what we can't help doing."

"There's one thing I'd like to do very much, anyhow—and that's to have five minutes' quiet talk with the woman who is at the back of all this. Do you think it could be Mrs. Abbey?"

Lily Christine sighed. Oh, if only Nannie would stop talking, stop pegging away!

"Even if it is, Nannie, nobody will know until it's all over and he marries her. She is not the woman to let her name be mentioned in anything like this."

It was such an effort to hide her activity, to seem listless. But she did not want them to know what she was going to do. She must see Mrs. Abbey at once, to-night. This sort of thing must be stopped straight away. This blundering, cunning cruelty. Yes, blundering and cunning. Dragging poor Rupert Harvey in ! Oh, how shameful, how shameful it was !

She felt she must be active, up and doing. She could not bear standing about much longer. When *would* Nappie and Sonia go ! How they pegged away at everything, the dears. Now they would begin pegging away at keeping her spirits up. She could not bear that. She *must* get rid of them.

She passed a hand over her forehead, trying to look very tired.

“ I think I’ll rest now,” she said.

They were delighted, but showed no immediate inclination to go. Were they going to see her safely into bed ? She began to feel hysterical. Was there *no* way of getting rid of kind friends ?

“ Aren’t you two going to be very late for dinner ? ” she said.

That struck home at Nappie, for he had an intellectual man’s hearty appetite. All the same, he dithered about. How guilty friends made one feel when one wanted to be alone.

“ What about your dinner ? ” he said. “ Will you be all right ? ”

“ Oh yes ! Hempel will make me an egg or something.”

But it was not until Hempel came in with information about oysters that Nappie seemed to feel it would be safe to leave Lily Christine alone, that she was being properly cared for.

The moment they had left the room she became what is

called "another woman." There was a whirl of activity. Oh, the pleasure of bustling about, quickly, quickly.

To begin with, she bolted down the oysters. Hempel looked on, agitated, uneasy.

"Surprising appearance of oysters, Hempel. Where did they come from?"

"Hyde Park Hotel, madam. Must be from Mr. Ambatriadi."

Of course, who else would have thought of them? But she could give Ambatriadi scarcely a thought. Oh, what a life, the things that happened!

She startled Hempel by telling her to stir her stumps and get her clothes. Hempel got very rattled, quite useless. Lily Christine said wicked things to her. On occasions she could swear like a bargee. It was surprising, the words she knew. They reminded Hempel with acute distress of her late lamented father.

"But it's raining, madam!"

"Out of my way, Hempel. You old cow!"

"You'll catch your death of cold, out of a warm bed."

Lily Christine dressed quickly, austereiy.

"But where are you going to, madam?" Hempel whimpered.

"Just a walk, Hempel. Exercise."

"Walk! On a night like this!"

Lily Christine, striding out, burst out laughing. Then she kissed Hempel.

"Don't worry, Hempel. I'm all right."

"Shall I wait up for you, madam?"

"Yes. No. Of course not. The idea!"

All the length of the quiet street she walked and to the corner of Belgrave Square before she realized that she had forgotten her spectacles. Blind and lost. Oh, drat Hempel! The old cow. She could not cross Belgrave Square without her spectacles. She could just manage

ordinary crossings, but not Belgrave Square or Hyde Park Corner or Trafalgar Square. A nice mess on the ground would be the result. Well, as she couldn't cross, she could walk round. Exercise. Her legs knew their business to-night, too. How they went ahead ! She seemed to fly, the rain beating on her face. Chilly it was too, stinging chilly, good. Oh, goody, good, good ! She crossed the streets like a streak of lightning. All she had to do was to peer about, use her ears, and make a dash. It was fun, the swift, silly adventure. But *what* a way to get killed, idiotic ! She laughed, it was exciting. Brakes grinding at her heels. People swearing at her. Naughty, naughty ! Oh, how good it was to walk quickly, the rain on her face, stinging, chilly. She was glad now she had forgotten her spectacles. She couldn't see even her thoughts clearly. And a pair of broken spectacles had begun this mess. The finger of God. Poor old Rupert. That Mrs. Abbey. Telling her how Ivor respected her and put her on a pedestal, telling her she must never let him think differently of her—and plotting, plotting, against her. Collecting evidence. A nice, friendly companion, Mrs. Abbey. Poor old Ivor. What a life she would lead him. Poor old boy. She'd manage him all right, all right. Ivor must have mentioned it to Mrs. Abbey, the way his wife had met Harvey. And Mrs. Abbey had seen her chance and made enquiries. Just a nice, unsuspecting friend, *dear* Mrs. Abbey. So respectable. Did she, could she, *really* think her, Lily Christine capable of promiscuous affairs like that ? Ugh, how nasty ! She, Lily Christine, accused of leaping in and out of bed with strangers. Well, just fancy ! Nice character to have. Just a nasty old woman, that was what Mrs. Abbey was, to think of such things. Oh, it was good to be striding through the rain, quickly, quickly, washing off the dirt. Poor old Ivor. No more

pieces of nonsense for him, anyhow. Mrs. Abbey would see to that all right. A respectable woman, that's what she was. What would she say to Mrs. Abbey? Well, what? But she couldn't think of that now, the words would come.

She was by Admiralty Arch when she heard Big Ben striking eleven. She must hurry, she must hurry. But she could not cross Trafalgar Square. She was scared of Trafalgar Square even with her spectacles on. Better women than she had been turned into mincemeat in Trafalgar Square. "Taxi, taxi!" The pigs! "Taxi, taxi!" Pigs, pigs, pigs, *pigs!* "Taxi, *taxi!*" They hurried by, a blur of lights. To think she'd tipped taxi-drivers in her time! And Mrs. Abbey's theatre was in the Strand. And she couldn't find a taxi. And she simply could not cross Trafalgar Square. A poor little lost girl, that's what she was. And why couldn't she cross Trafalgar Square, spectacles or no spectacles? Why not, indeed? What next! She laughed, it was exciting. She ran. If a bus hit her, darkness. If a Rolls hit her, a luxurious death, paradise, Peter meeting her with a sandwich and a cup of tea. Snob. Her feet were stupid on the greasy road. But there wasn't much traffic. How silly to run! Looked silly, too. Scuttling across. Really, really, *really!* Where's your pride, girl? She walked, her head high. Now, did she look silly? Blind or not, she didn't look it. Head high, she walked. She could feel her legs striding ahead. Then she saw blurred lights, this way, that way. Crushing her. Darkness, lights. Ow, cars, buses! She ran, her heart bursting. The greasy road slipped away from her feet. Brakes grinding, shouts. "Hey!" "Oi!" "What you at there!" She laughed, panting. She was across, in the Strand. "Hey! Oi!" she mocked, panting. The crowd on the pavement shoved at her, white blank faces.

She went right at them. They parted, gave way to her. They seemed to slip away before her, the rather soiled faces. Well, naturally. Hadn't she just crossed Trafalgar Square as though it were a piece of cheese? They were the slow, she was the swift, the swift, the swift. Bravo, Lily Christine, bravo! And she cut through the crowd. They blocked her path, waiting for buses, but she cut through. Why, hadn't she crossed Trafalgar Square, blind as she was? And what could stop her now? Courage, Lily Christine! *De l'audace!* Defiance! She walked on swiftly, strong, stronger than all her enemies put together. Her heart was bursting, her head high. Confidence, courage! People shoved against her. The sloppy brutes. "Brrr!" she hissed, passing. Startled, they fell away from her cold white face. Brrr! She swung on, leaving a trail of meanly surprised eyes.

"I want to see Mrs. Abbey, please."

Her own voice surprised her, so cold and brisk it was. Courage, confidence! The world was all right if you met it full and square—and with audacity. That was essential, a touch of audacity.

"What name, please?"

"Mrs. Summerrest."

The stage-door man, stretching a hand out to the telephone, looked at her curiously. Naturally, he must know Ivor pretty well. She looked back at him coldly, and he lowered his eyes.

Then he spoke into the telephone. Then he waited. Then he listened. Then he replaced the receiver. Then he tapped his teeth thoughtfully with the end of a dirty yellow pencil.

"She's afraid she's engaged and can't see you, he said.

"But I must see her, it's important!"

"Sorry, ma'am."

But she knew she was going to see Mrs. Abbey. She

never had a doubt of it. "Sorry ma'am." Nonsense! And when she suddenly heard Harvey's voice and turned to find him and Ambatriadi behind her, she was not really surprised.

"Andy, I must see Mrs. Abbey, please."

She hoped she did not seem too cold and brisk, but she could not help it. They were people in a mist, everyone was in a mist, dim faces in a dim world. The only thing in the world that was quite clear was that she must see Mrs. Abbey and get her to stop Ivor behaving in this awful way.

But the dim faces of her two friends looked concerned, anxious. It irritated her, impeded her. Oh, get along, get along! Why were people so slow? Why was no one ever quick enough? Poor old Rupert. He looked so worried. Well, he would have something to worry about sooner than he knew. Poor old boy. But why should he ever know of the vile trick that was being played on him? If she could only get at Mrs. Abbey she could clear it up in no time.

At last, at last, she and Ambatriadi were in the lift, and then in a bare narrow passage with closed doors on each side. She wanted to walk quickly, but Andy was ahead of her, barring her way.

"Andy, I know the way," she said impatiently.

"Yes, but I must knock—or you mightn't be let in."

Then he knocked on a door, there was a cry of "Come in!" and he opened the door, but before he could get a word out, Lily Christine brushed by him into the room and closed the door behind her.

"Well!" said Mrs. Abbey, staring.

"Yes, I'm sorry to force my way in like this," Lily Christine said quickly. "But I simply had to see you for a few minutes."

"Well!" said Mrs. Abbey, staring. And then she

laughed in that rather loud, unaffected, infectious way of hers.

There was something so unbearably common about the hypocrisy of that honest laugh that Lily Christine could scarcely restrain a shiver.

"Please don't laugh," she said. "Will you listen to me for a moment?"

"Of course!" Mrs. Abbey smiled. Her lovely grey eyes were uncertain, watchful. She watched Lily Christine intently.

She was standing in a loose white wrapper, with her back to a small fire. She had not yet taken off her stage make-up. Her lovely grey eyes flickered. She watched Lily Christine intently.

The room was a small, pretty sitting-room, full of framed photographs and flowers. Through an open door Lily Christine caught a blurred glimpse of the dressing-room, and the dresser moving about in there.

"Really I never was so taken aback in my life!" Mrs. Abbey said, smiling. Her voice was friendly, but she looked at Lily Christine intently, watching every movement.

"It's about Ivor, of course," Lily Christine said quickly. And she took a step or two toward Mrs. Abbey, to see her more clearly.

Mrs. Abbey started back, watching her intently. Lily Christine stopped, amazed. Then Mrs. Abbey laughed in that rather loud, very frank way of hers.

Lily Christine's nerves were set jangling by that wretched laugh. For the moment no words would come to her.

Mrs. Abbey darted a glance at the open door to the dressing-room, where the dresser was working. But all the time her voice was natural and quite friendly.

"Oh, I don't like scenes!" she complained with that

smiling good-fellowship that had made her so beloved on the stage.

"I'm not going to make a scene, really not," Lily Christine said painfully. "I only want to appeal to you not to go on making Ivor behave like a cad. It's cruel to him, cruel to everyone. Isn't it?"

Mrs. Abbey simply darted across the room and closed the dressing-room door.

Then she turned to Lily Christine and said pleasantly but unnecessarily loudly :

"I said I couldn't see you because I am in such a hurry to dress as I am going to a dance. But please sit down. And won't you have a cup of tea? I've just made some."

Lily Christine felt her nerves would fail her completely if she did not say what she had to say quickly. 'I think that this woman had ever imposed on her! There was something so unnaturally, unbearably common about her—a vulgar pretender, scarcely human with all her pretences. The woman was pretending, pretending, pretending, all the time. Wrapped up in lies and pretences, she was terrified of the least whisper that might injure her beastly reputation. She had to lie and talk loudly even for the benefit of her maid in the next room. Fancy having to act before one's maid!

"We had a marvellous house for the time of the year," Mrs. Abbey said unnecessarily loudly, pouring out a cup of tea.

"Mrs. Abbey, please do listen to me! I'm not asking you to give up Ivor or anything like that. But if you want to marry him surely there *must* be a kinder way of managing it than—"

Suddenly, Mrs. Abbey put down her tea-cup and came close to her, very close. And there was a confidence, an assurance, about her loveliness that for a moment made Lily Christine feel small and weak.

"Get out of here!" Mrs. Abbey whispered. "Go on—get out!"

Lily Christine stared at her stupidly, quite dumb.

"Coming here!" Mrs. Abbey whispered. "Silly little blackmailer. Go on—get out!"

"Yes, I'm going," Lily Christine managed to say. But she could not move, felt chained there, staring stupidly at the lovely radiant face that was saying these horrible things.

"Trying your hard-luck stories on me!" Mrs. Abbey whispered. "Thinking you were going to blackmail me by trying to make a scene. Little fool! Go back to your casual promiscuous life. That's all you're good for—you and your friends. Messing about!"

"Yes, I'm going," Lily Christine said, breathing quickly. "I only thought—"

"You thought!" Mrs. Abbey whispered. And she darted a glance at the two doors in the room, as though to make certain no one was coming in.

Lily Christine felt she was in a horrible dream, trying to move her feet and finding them immovable.

"Daring to come in here!" Mrs. Abbey whispered, scarcely audible. "Do you think I've worked so hard all these years to have my name ruined in connection with your wretched society messes? I wouldn't dream of discussing Ivor with you. You've no more business with Ivor—understand that. He has promised me not to see you until it's all over and done with. I'm going to make a decent responsible life for him. You have only your casual promiscuous little lusts to blame for what's happened. Why don't you behave yourself if you want to be happy? You and your nasty little 'affairs'! Now get out of here."

But Lily Christine did not hear more than a little of that. Her mind was moving much too actively to listen to

the stuff. Quite calmly she walked out of the room. Mrs. Abbey passed completely out of her mind, like the dirty stories Ivor would now and again tell her. Her mind worked furiously. It raced along. How was she to get Rupert Ilarvey out of this mess, now that this avenue was finally closed? She must write to Ivor, that was the thing to do. She must *make* him see her. At once, to-night, she would write. Sentences began forming in her mind. She saw them written down, one by one, impassive, compelling.

She could hardly stop to speak to Ilarvey and Ambatriadi who were waiting for her near the stage door. Her mind was so busy, she had to walk quickly. In her mind she wrote several complete letters to Ivor, calculated to *make* him see her.

When she got home she quickly dashed off a short note in pencil.

“Please don’t behave like a frightened baby. It’s all right, dear, don’t think I’m going to try to bully you with my misery. I’m really miserable for someone else much more than for myself. I simply must see you just once—and very soon. *Must*, Ivor! You can’t refuse me. Do behave a little bit, darling. I’ll come over to Paris if you like.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE next day Harvey waited to hear from Lily Christine, as she had said she wanted to see him. The new warlike Lily Christine. How surprising people were, how subtly and queerly contrived, changing so quickly, but never falsely, being true to themselves in incredibly different ways, softening, hardening, sighing, fighting. One day they sighed, the next they fought. One day weak and sad, the next swift and purposeful and defiant as the devil. He remembered her eyes last night, shining in the lamp-light, flowery blue, but cold, very cold, warlike.

Hearing nothing from her at about four o'clock he got through to her house. However, she was not in. Presently a boy came in with Neville Parwen's card. He was surprised and pleased, for Parwen had never before come to see him. While the boy was fetching him, Harvey wondered if the trip to Paris could have anything to do with this visit. But he could not see how it could. They had never discussed Lily Christine's affairs together in her absence.

Neville Parwen said at once that Lily Christine had asked him to come. He had a malacca cane with an old ivory handle, yellow and cracked with age, and he never ceased playing with it. But that was the only expressive sign he made ; he looked masked.

He did not beat about the bush at all. Quite briefly he told Harvey exactly how matters stood, that Summerest was intending to divorce his wife and was citing him, Harvey as the co-respondent. No doubt he would be served with a writ in a day or two, so there was no

sense in trying to make out it was not a thoroughly bad business.

"I needn't tell you, of course," Parwen added, in the expressionless way he had when dealing with things that disgusted him, "that we all know it's nonsense and that you can count on us to do what we can."

"Of course, yes," Harvey said blankly.

He was quite stupefied, not alive at all. He seemed to have no feelings in his mind or body, was quite numbed.

"And Sumnerest?" he said with a great effort, for something to say. "Does he think it nonsense, too?"

Harvey, in his numbed state, noticed that Parwen's lips twitched in an odd way before he spoke.

"I haven't a doubt of it," he said coldly. "The kindest we can say of him is that he can't be in his right senses."

Harvey tried to quicken himself, but found he was talking quite mechanically.

"And you say that Starrilaw says it looks like a strong case?"

"Unfortunately, the way things seem to have fallen out that night. Lily Christine and I had a long session with him this morning. He was—depressing."

"From my own point of view, of course," Harvey said thoughtfully, as though he were looking at himself from the outside, "I don't give a button. Not a button. It's my wife. . . ."

"Yes, of course."

Harvey felt he was coming to life, found he hadn't time to say what he thought, his thoughts began racing so. He sat up in his chair, gripping the arms.

"God, I feel badly about it, Parwen—I mean, about having let Lily Christine in for this because of my confounded thoughtlessness. My wife told me at the time——"

A faint smile broke Neville Parwen's mask.

"Knowing Lily Christine, you mayn't be surprised to hear that her main concern in all this is to get you out of an impossible position—which, so she says, you are in owing entirely to her."

"No, that won't do. I feel infernally guilty of—criminal thoughtlessness. My wife was annoyed with me at the time."

"Seriously, Harvey, I really can't see how you can blame yourself with any justice for playing the Good Samaritan to a stranded motorist."

Harvey stared at him blankly, trying to collect his wits. There was a weary silence.

"Of all the bloody messes!" he said at last.

Parwen's lips twitched in a funny way before he spoke.

"It's a fine look out for all of us, isn't it, when men like Summerest begin behaving in this incredible way?"

The thought of Summerest was so bitter to Harvey that a small cheap paper-knife he was playing with snapped between his fingers.

Parwen rose abruptly.

"Are you coming to see Lily Christine this evening?"

"I don't think I can face her just yet, Parwen. I really do feel too much to blame."

"She will be disappointed at not seeing you—thinking you are angry with her."

"Please tell her there's no question of that—it's the other way round, in fact. But I've got to think first of breaking the glad news to my wife."

"Of course. I'm awfully sorry, Harvey. It's a vile business."

To Parwen's surprise, Harvey suddenly burst out laughing.

"I'm thinking," he explained, "of my wife's expression

while I'm telling her. She said at the time I'd been— indiscreet. Now she would die rather than say 'I told you so,' but that's what she will be thinking."

"If that's all she will think," Parwen said smiling, "you are a very fortunate husband."

"Oh, I'm that! I wish, though, I wasn't such an unfortunate friend."

"Frankly, Harvey, I simply *can't* believe it can come to anything."

"You mean Summerrest might suddenly come to his senses and drop the whole case?"

"Well, she has written to him asking him to see her. When he does, I *can't* think he will be able to face it out. For the funny part of it all is—that the fellow is so fond of her."

"I wouldn't mind," Harvey said slowly, "seeing him myself for a quiet five minutes."

"This morning," Parwen said, smiling wryly at the points of his shoes, "she said that if the thing actually does look like coming on—rather than let you suffer for your kindness to a stranger she will pick up a man in the street and send the hotel bill to Summerrest."

Harvey was unbearably agitated.

"Look here, Parwen—for God's sake stop her doing anything rash!" He jumped up from his chair, trying to master his agitation. "Anyhow, I don't think he can go on with the idiotic business. Why, against our defences, a judge would laugh the case out of court."

"Well . . . perhaps you had better see what your lawyers say."

"Shall I use Starrilaw, too?"

"He is said to be very good in these cases."

"Heavens, Parwen, the whole thing is—absurd! Why our first line of defence knocks the case to smithereens!"

" That you two had never so much as set eyes on one another until that evening ? "

" Of course ! "

Parwen, looking at the point of his shoes, sighed.

" Starrilaw says that is your weak point."

Harvey pulled at his moustache angrily.

" These lawyers ! He doesn't think we will be believed, I suppose ? "

" His point is that even if a judge can be persuaded to believe that—it will do you and Lily Christine no good."

" Very jolly ! Why ? "

" Well, look at it from the average point of view. A well-brought-up young lady meets a man in a lane at half-past eight—and by ten o'clock gets to trust him so completely that instead of putting up at the nearest inn she stays in the house with him—and his wife is away."

" Oh, I know it can be made to sound—extremely casual. But that's all—casual."

" It will make bad hearing in a divorce court, as a sign of character. That's Starrilaw's point. A judge will think Lily Christine so—casual—that he'd be ready to think the worst of her."

" It's a charming world, Parwen ! "

" Well, everyone doesn't see the same thing in the same way."

" Everyone sees it with a dirty mind ! "

" The average point of view, Harvey, is always inclined to be—suspicious."

" I've always considered my point of view average enough—and I'm bothered if I can see anything wrong in a respectable man putting up a respectable woman for the night."

" Not even when the respectable man is seen coming out of the bedroom of the respectable woman—whom he'd never set eyes on a couple of hours ago ? "

"Indiscreet, thoughtless—casual—yes. But not more."

"And—presumably—going back to her bedroom?"

Harvey stared at him in stupefaction. Had Parwen gone mad? Did *he* think . . . ?

"For in the morning," Parwen went on in his most expressionless way, "the servants found that his bed hadn't been slept in."

"Good God, I'd forgotten that! I made up a shake-down outside with a couple of chairs."

"I know. Lily Christine told me. It's unfortunate though, that you had never slept out before, or since."

"But I couldn't, man! My wife wouldn't let me—so I took the only chance I had—while she was away. I say, Parwen—that part looks bad, does it?"

"I'm afraid so, Harvey. The two servants whom you engaged with the house and who will give evidence were quite convinced that you'd been up to no good that night."

"Well, I'm damned! Bother my wife! If she hadn't been so set against my sleeping out, I'd never have done it."

"And then, on top of everything, the lovely stranger disappears in a fast motor-car before the man's wife comes home."

There was something fantastic in the way everything fitted together. The trouble the gods take, the loving care they spend, in fitting utterly dissimilar facts together to make a perfect and cruel whole!

Harvey could not help laughing at the fantasy of it.

"I feel," he said, "that in the end perhaps our best defence will lie in the fact that I simply do not *look* the kind of man who could have such an instantaneous success with a lovely young woman."

"No, you don't," Parwen said with perfect seriousness. He walked to the door. "Well, no doubt you will be

seeing Starrilaw in the morning and coming to your own conclusions. Good night, Harvey. I'm infernally sorry about—everything."

He was passing out of the room, a tall, thin, dandyish, old-fashioned figure. Harvey stopped him.

"Parwen, I suppose what you've really been getting at all this time is that Starrilaw feels there's not much use defending a case like this?"

Parwen hesitated. "I'm afraid so, as things stand now. But something may turn up. As I said, I've great hopes of her influence over the fellow—if he will see her."

Harvey, left alone to pace his office, did not feel that there was any particular tragedy for himself in this idiotic combination of circumstances. He, as an individual, seemed to come to less harm than anyone else concerned. Lily Christine's state of mind did not bear thinking of, seeing she loved the fellow. While the thought of Muriel and her respectable circle of friends made him—physically—wriggle with discomfort.

Well! Muriel cherished her way of life; this kind of upset would distress her profoundly. There was nothing "modern" about Muriel. Silly word, but it meant something once in ten thousand times. It was unfair on her, it really was. And those friends of hers, nice dull people, how they would gape! Yes, it was the devil of an upset! Funny to think how bad luck might be lying in wait for one in the long grass.

Of course, divorcees weren't reported in full nowadays, that was a good thing. As a journalist he never had agreed with muzzling a free press like that, but he was uncommonly glad of it now. All the same, there was no chance of hustling up this kind of thing, not even with old Townleigh's influence. Everyone would know. It was "news," this kind of a mess.

Poor old Muriel! Poor old girl! And his mother, and

her mother. Well ! A pleasant shock it would be for the old ones, this kind of an upset—about him of all people. The explanations to be gone through. Oh, the devil ! It really was too bad the old people should be distressed by such idiocy. Quiet as a mouse they'd always thought him, too—and now he would have to explain, explain, explain.

Casual. Yes, they'd think Lily Christine casual enough. The old ones would blame her for this. "Casual," they'd say, "unladylike. Behaving anyhow." Yes, they would, they'd blame her. And maybe they wouldn't blame Summerrest so much. This was a man's country about those things. They'd say Lily Christine had got what she had asked for, going about behaving anyhow. They were terribly cruel, the old people. How stony-hearted old people were about strangers who got their children into trouble of any kind.

Yes, this kind of divorce would make a noise. Summerrest was a famous person—the great "sportsman"—good God !—and so was Lily Christine, in her way. Well-known people. That always meant a lot of dirt.

Not that his own end of it, when he came to face it, would be so easy, either. Lucky for him, of course that his wa n't the sort of job where it really mattered about his being a co-respondent. Some poor devils would have to resign and Heaven knows what. Pity they didn't live in America.

Old Townleigh would be furious. The old boy would stick up for him, of course, as he always did for all his people. Still, England wasn't America by any means, and divorces weren't to everybody's taste. The old boy would be confoundly annoyed, and no mistake. "Guileless," he'd say, "guileless, young Harvey !" Journalists weren't supposed to be angels, true, but leaders of opinion couldn't afford to live in glass houses, either. Leaders of

opinion. What nonsense it was ! Still, the editorial staff of a great morning newspaper had to be a most respectable body of men—in appearance, anyhow.

What a devilish mess it was. And all about *nothing*, just damn-all.

Bang went that new job now, too. The old boy had half promised him the editorial chair of the *New Weekly Press* at the end of the year. Bang went all chances of *that* for several years. He hadn't realized until now how much he had been looking forward to it—apart from the extra bit of money it would have brought in, about six hundred a year. Well, he must make the best of a bad job, that was all. Concentrate more on his private writing in future, try and do something on his own.

He found it almost impossible to think of Mrs. Abbey at all clearly. Obviously, she was somewhere at the back of this ; he'd have to face that now. Lily Christine going to see her last night—like a hero seeking out a dragon—and coming out, heroically absent-minded. Female word, hero. Made men, even heroes, feel damn silly. But not in the privacy of their thoughts. Liked it, really. Infernal liars, men. Always blushing at the "right" moments. Red outside, heroes inside. And what about women ? Mrs. Abbey. Yes, Mrs. Abbey was a whitened sepulchre, apparently. Well ! So Ambatriadi had been right with his "crafty Mrs. Abbey." The world was a funny place. Mrs. Abbey emerging in an entirely new rôle as Mrs. Satan. Well !

Still, that was all supposition, really. They hadn't anything definite against Mrs. Abbey, really. It was no use piling all the blame on *her*. Ambatriadi was an excitable devil, anyhow. A good fellow, but infernally excitable. The point was, they hadn't a thing against Mrs. Abbey in all this except that she was a friend of Summerest's. If Summerest chose to fall in love with her,

you couldn't really blame her for it. Silly asses must be falling in love with her every day.

He was glad her name hadn't been so much as mentioned between Parwen and himself. What was the sense of dragging her name in when one wasn't certain of anything? He simply could not connect Mrs. Abbey with devilish machinations, anyhow. He wouldn't even say anything about Mrs. Abbey to Muriel; leave her out altogether. Yes, that would be the best thing, leave Mrs. Abbey out altogether. The affair was messy enough as it was, without adding more complications. He could tell Muriel he didn't know anything about Summerest's ulterior motives in this shabby business—which was true enough, really.

Although, of course, Ambatriadi's main point against Mrs. Abbey was that if any other woman but she had been behind all this Summerest could have got Lily Christine to divorce him in the ordinarily decent way, whereas, Mrs. Abbey simply would not have anything to do with a man who had been divorced. Well! So Mrs. Abbey must be at the back of it, that was obvious. The world was a funny place. Imagine a woman who could be so callously selfish in defence of her public "respectability!" Confound her respectability.

All the same, it was no good being unfair to her. Suppose she really did think Lily Christine capable of promiscuous goings-on. After all, she didn't know Lily Christine at all well, and she didn't know him, Harvey, at all. And she was prejudiced against young people like Lily Christine, anyhow. She probably *did* think Lily Christine guilty—that was what it was. Yes, Ambatriadi had sunimed her up pretty well. And as she was an upright uncompromising woman she was going to see justice done on the erring wife. That must be it. A nice world. Why the dickens couldn't Christians forget Moses and remember Christ for a change.

Yes, he could see Mrs. Abbey as the stern Puritan quite easily. A mean, suspicious sort of character for a woman to have, of course, but it wasn't as though she was a crafty scheming plotter. He didn't believe in crafty scheming plotters—not in England, anyhow.

Anyhow, it would be no good saying anything about Mrs. Abbey to Muriel. For one thing, she wouldn't believe a word against Mrs. Abbey—and if she did, the only effect it would have would be to upset her more than ever about the whole business.

He wondered how Muriel would take it all, whether she would resent Lily Christine very bitterly, blame her. "Casual, unladylike, behaving anyhow." But Muriel wasn't like that, not when there was trouble to face. He had complete faith in her. The old girl was always right in her instincts, always.

But no good saying anything about Mrs. Abbey to her. That *might* knock her instincts endways. There was no knowing how the fact that Mrs. Abbey was against Lily Christine might influence the old girl. She might even come to think Lily Christine *had* had designs on him that night when she asked him into her bedroom for a cigarette.

When he reached home, a little after six, he was still turning over in his mind exactly how he would put the wretched story. But, on softly opening the study door, the first thing he saw was a Lily Christine kind of leg dangling over the arm of his particular chair. Shining like sand it was, as it dangled unashamed in the fire-light.

There she was, at it again, putting respectable people's backs up, making them suspicious. Muriel wouldn't like that at all, a young lady sitting all anyhow, showing a long, elegant, shameless leg for all the world to see. Muriel couldn't sit like that, not if she was paid. Of course she hadn't a particularly exciting leg to show, but

Lily Christine would have dangled hers over the arms of chairs even if they had looked as sober as Muriel's.

He would have stolen out again if Muriel had not seen him.

"It's not really Lily Christine come to see us!" he tried to say lightly.

He did not know whether he was glad or sorry. His heart was beating so fast that he did not know anything but that he would die for her if it would do her any real good. And he expected Muriel to share that sentiment, too.

"It is indeed, and thank goodness for it!" Muriel said resentfully.

"She has told you then!"

"She has."

He was enormously relieved. What a wonder this Lily Christine was! Casual she might be—there she was sitting all anyhow, showing yards of leg and knee—but when it came to working for her friends she thought of everything and nothing was too much trouble.

They were sitting in the firelight, Muriel on the sofa, Lily Christine in his arm-chair, the tea-things between them. Lily Christine must have asked Muriel to turn the lights out; lights hurt her eyes sometimes.

She twisted her head in his direction, peering at him, smiling faintly.

"It's a hard life, Rupert, isn't it?"

"A surprising one, anyhow."

"Poor old boy! What a shock you must have had to-day. It's no good trying to tell you how sorry I am. I'm afraid you'll just have to take that for granted. Will you?"

A jewel at the side of her small black hat glittered wickedly in the firelight. And the impish thing seemed to glitter right into him, into his racing heart, trying to show him up.

"Tea, please," he said to Muriel, shortly enough.

Muriel made a clatter on the tray. The grand old girl. How trustworthy, how right, she looked. And he had thought for a second that she might blame Lily Christine. . . .

"When I thanked goodness she was here," Muriel said, giving him his tea, "I meant, what a good thing it is she has told me all this instead of you. It would have taken you till Christmas."

He was enormously lightened, made almost gay, by Muriel's decency. This shabby affair did not seem to matter half so much now.

"Nice sort of Christmas story it would make!" he laughed. "I'm glad Lily Christine nobly took on the job of telling you, though. All the way here I've been wondering how I'd set about it."

"You would have pulled your moustache to pieces before you had finished, that's all I know."

"Yes, it's a trying kind of tale for a respectable man to bring home to his wife," Lily Christine said thoughtfully.

"Look at that, Rupert!" Muriel said resentfully. "That's been her attitude all along. Light. Casual."

"Don't say 'casual,'" Lily Christine smiled. "The lawyers this morning said I had been a sight too 'casual' as it was. I should hate that word—if only I knew what it meant. Rupert?"

"It means being innocent—in a damned suspicious world."

"Yes," Muriel said slowly. "I'm beginning to think it *must* mean that."

"Parwen broke the news to me," Harvey said. Marvellous bedside manner he has. I hardly felt any pain until he had gone."

"Yes, dearest Nappie! All day long he has been pegging away at it."

" You see, she takes it quite lightly ! " Muriel burst out. " She has told me the whole abominable story as though it didn't concern her at all, as though you and I were the only people to worry about."

Harvey looked at Lily Christine earnestly, paternally.

" That's perfect nonsense, Lily Christine—that attitude. I want to talk to you about that. What you must get into your head is this—that I'm wretchedly to blame. Even at the time Muriel said I had been thoughtless and—and indiscreet."

He was sitting beside Muriel on the sofa, and suddenly she squeezed his hand. He looked at her gratefully, and was disconcerted to see her eyes gleaming with tears. He realized he had not really given a thought to her since coming in. He gripped her hand tightly, remorsefully forgetful of Lily Christine. Muriel tried to smile away his look of concern.

" Don't worry, dear," she whispered. " Look—she seems to be in a dream."

But what a far-away dream it must be, she looked so remote, not of them, not of the room. What was she dreaming of—so sternly? And always there was that white intent look about her, which had so moved him last night. He realized that he had always thought of her as someone who yielded to the circumstances of her life, tried to flow along with them. He'd thought of her as weak. He had not thought she could be like this, wrapped in stern, far-off thoughts, trying to stem the unhappy dark current of her life with a sword.

He could not help being afraid for her, too. She was too remote from the small things of life, too unconcerned with small points. That was just the trouble. Small points had sharp nails, much sought after by the lust for crucifying the individual that always lurks somewhere in Christianity. But she was too far away, fighting dragons

when she should be cajoling dustmen into thinking well of her. What a fool she was ! Oh, bless her !

“ Lily Christine ! ” he called.

“ Yes ? ”

“ Did you hear what I said ? ”

“ What was it, dear ? ”

“ That you must *not* worry your head about my side of all this. I can take care of myself, I assure you.”

“ Yes, I’m sure you can ! ” Muriel sighed. “ I think, Rupert, you had better let Mrs. Summerest’s lawyers manage this hateful business and interfere as little as you can.”

“ I don’t think you should call me Mrs. Summerest,” Lily Christine said, “ considering how closely we are going to be related.”

“ My poor child ! ” Muriel sighed. “ Oh, what horrible things men can do ! ”

“ Whereas women . . . ” Harvey began.

“ What ? ” snapped Muriel.

“ I’ll tell you something,” Harvey addressed Lily Christine. “ In this disheartening affair there is only one piece of luck I can see. But what a piece that is ! It has never even occurred to my wife to think we could have been guilty.”

“ Nor to my husband,” Lily Christine said absently. “ Though that hasn’t done us much good as yet.”

“ Really, Rupert, I never heard of anything so silly ! ” Muriel snapped. “ Guilty ! You ! ”

“ It *is* luck, though,” Lily Christine said earnestly. “ Yes, indeed it is. I really don’t think I could have borne it all otherwise.”

Muriel looked at him resentfully, as though to say : “ There you are—putting such a daft idea into her head ! ”

“ And finally,” Harvey said, “ You must get rid of the

idea once and for all that we are blaming you at all for what you can't help."

"Well, stop harping on it," Muriel said.

Lily Christine suddenly sat up in her chair and looked from one to the other of them with a faint smile that somehow emphasized the gravity of her expression.

"I know you're not blaming me—you are two dear real friends, that's what you are. But just imagine the opposite—imagine what I'd be feeling now if Muriel had been the sort of person who would have made you both unhappy—because of me! Imagine. . . ."

And she startled them by suddenly jumping up, as though she had reached the end of her patience with the stupidity of things.

She stood staring down at the fire, as though suspended there, unwillingly. There was an extraordinary animation about her, a tense, savage impatience. Deep within herself she was living, tensely, savagely, living every second of life with sharp, defiant pride. She wasn't giving away, not she! How unknowable she was, in her gallant zest for life, in her tense, fruitful defiance. He saw the flame of life burning high behind a shadow of her face, and he felt he was a corpse beside her.

All the same, it was safe to be a corpse. It was practical. One could not fall down. Whereas she, with the proud flame of life burning high in her, what would happen to her?

Suddenly she broke the silence.

"I've a good mind to give Ivor a most awful shock."

Her voice made him uneasy. It was hard, almost cruel. Then he tried to pull himself together, to stop romancing about her. But he could not help it. What had she to do with Ivor? Why was she worrying about Ivor? What was Ivor Summerest but a weak, muddle-headed man? She should be prouder, proud as the flame of life that

was in her and made all beside her look like corpses. But she had been trapped somehow. The free, fine, defiant flame within had somehow been caught in the grubby coils of this earth, and she could not get free. Defiance could not free her, nor courage, nor pride, nor right, nor wrong. She was trapped, broken—by familiar grubbi-nesses. In the very husks of her was a butterfly with broken wings.

“How?” he asked. But what did it matter?

She laughed, making him uneasy.

“Well, what a shock it would be for him if I suddenly ran away with someone—cloped.”

He stirred uneasily, about to say something.

“It ought to be easy enough for you to find someone,” Muriel said, laughing.

“I’m not so sure,” Lily Christine said seriously. “Men aren’t quite such fools as we are in the habit of thinking, Muriel. They don’t like being used.”

Harvey flushed with anger. What silly talk this was! He hated talk about what “men” do, and “women” think. Cheap generalizations.

“It’s fantastic to talk like that!” he snapped.

He felt that Muriel was looking at him curiously. He could not turn to her. He tried to control his voice.

“You’ll see,” he added quite lightly, “everything will come out all right.”

“Of course, it must,” Lily Christine said coldly. And he was frightened into silence.

She was not at all warm to him, she had no time for him, she was thinking of him only as a symbol for the idea of friendship, the idea of friendship which she revered and would fight for, fight for to the last ditch. And she was most beautiful to him in her tense indifference to persons.

“I’ve written to Ivor,” she was saying, “and I think he

is sure to come and see me. Then he and I will have to come to some other arrangement. I won't have you two dears entangled."

Suddenly Muriel arose and put an arm around her. She looked so safe, so reassuring, beside the slender figure.

"Thank you for being so . . . understanding," Lily Christine said, looking down into the fire.

"My child, you mustn't worry so much about Rupert and me. We are old enough to know how to meet the good and bad in life as it comes. And we are both so terribly sorry for you."

"Yes," Harvey said. "The old girl—always right. He looked down at the floor, his eyes dim.

"Oh, me!" Lily Christine said sharply, laughing—and suddenly she seemed to crumple into nothing in Muriel's arms. She clung to Muriel, sobbing.

"The shame of it!" she whispered. "Ivor letting my friends in for this!"

Harvey wanted to run out of the room. He could not bear it, felt he could not control his anguish. Her bitter humiliation was almost more than he could bear.

Then, over her trembling shoulder he saw Muriel looking at him with a new but old, old understanding. But it was no good, he could not change himself. He stared back at Muriel helplessly, in anguish.

Then, swiftly as a shadow, scarcely more than a shadow in the flickering light, Lily Christine was gone from Muriel's arms, she was at the door, had opened it.

"But let me call you a taxi!" Harvey cried, jumping up.

"No—please! I want to walk—can't walk enough these days. Good-bye. Good-bye, dear Muriel."

She was gone, her voice floating behind her. Harvey quickly followed her to the front door.

"We'll ring you up to-morrow," Muriel called from the study.

"But I'm going away to-night—now."

"Not to Paris!" Harvey exclaimed. Somehow that seemed terrible to him, that she should follow the fellow to Paris.

"Oh no—to the country to see my mother and the children."

Harvey opened the front door for her, feeling behind him her impatience to be gone. How cruel she was to him in her absorption in the idea of friendship.

It was not raining now, that was one good thing. He did not at all like the idea of her walking in the slippery streets.

"Good idea, going to the country," he said unnaturally.

She laughed, startling him. She was bewildering to-day, incomprehensible. It was that defiant flame in her, the bright and dangerous flame.

"There's one person who won't be surprised at anything Ivor could do," she said, laughing, "and that's my mother. If she and Timothy could understand one another, they would have a fine set-to about him. Good-bye, Rupert. I'll be back in a few days and ring you up."

She was gone, down the slippery steps, striding away.

"For Heaven's sake, Lily Christine, put on your spectacles when you cross the High Street."

She turned her head with a swift, careless smile that pricked his manhood into a sloppy nothingness.

"Yes, I will. Good-bye, dear."

Back in the study, he threw himself into the arm-chair she had left. The lights were on now, the maid was clearing away the tea-things. Muriel mixed him a whiskey-and-soda and brought it to him. He had to make an effort to lift his eyes to hers.

"You were a darling to her, Muriel, Bless you."

"Well, who wouldn't be sorry for the poor child."

"And who wouldn't be sorry for you—with all this trouble your silly husband has brought on you!"

"Oh, we'll survive that," she said lightly.

She fussed a little about the room. His eyes followed her, moonstruck. It was terrible, the insistent temptation to think of Lily Christine, to imagine her, make pictures of her. He felt indescribably mean—to both of them, Muriel and Lily Christine. And this meanness had an irresistible attraction for him; he kept on giving way to it. Sitting there, staring blankly at nothing, he felt he understood Summerrest.

"You said the other day the horrible man was in love with someone," Muriel said. "Is that why he is doing all this? She must be a nice woman! Do you know who it is?"

He found it, in his abstracted state of mind, surprisingly easy to lie convincingly.

"I haven't heard, dear. Don't let's talk of the fellow."

He had no idea how long they had been silent when he was made uneasy by the feeling that Muriel was looking intently at him. He turned to her sharply.

"What is it, Muriel?" He felt himself flushing.

"Nothing," she said slowly. Then she laughed.

He was intensely uncomfortable, not knowing what to say.

"My innocent!" she said, laughing.

When, on her way out of the room, she stooped to kiss him, he saw that her eyes were wet.

"It's all right, silly one," she said, smiling.

CHAPTER XIV

BUT Lily Christine did not come back in a week, nor yet in two. And Harvey heard nothing directly from her.

One night Neville Parwen and his wife dined with the Harveys, and when the two men were left alone Parwen said he had been down to the country to see how Lily Christine was and had found her in quite good spirits, but then she always was when her time was taken up with the children. He added that he had avoided being with her mother all he could, for the old lady was always ready with a long tirade against Summerest, whom she had not liked from the beginning. But that didn't prevent her from worshipping the fellow's children, which was a good thing, and from the pecuniary point of view she was bound to leave them all she had, so there was nothing to fear for them from Summerest's irresponsibility. Lily Christine had said nothing about him except that she was expecting him to come to London at any moment, and then she would come up to talk to him.

For Harvey, these days passed in something like a mist ; everything seemed unreal, quite unimportant. A lot of fuss about nothing, that was what it all was. He was served with his writ, of course, and now a co-respondent all according to law and order. Then there was a deal of talking to do, explaining, discussing. But he did not mind particularly ; it all passed in a sort of mist. Secretly he was intensely alive, living a vital secret life, but the outside things that happened seemed unreal and unimportant, and so quite easy to cope with.

Even old Townleigh, for instance, was quite easy to

cope with. The old boy was furious when he heard of the divorce, perfectly furious.

"That woman!" he boomed. "The hypocritical harlot!"

Harvey could not stop him, did not feel up to it.

"Didn't I warn you, young Harvey, that she would be up to something? Guileless young fools, putting yourselves in her hands!"

"But we haven't, so far as I know." Harvey said patiently.

"You haven't! Oh no, you are having a grand time, aren't you!"

"What I mean is, sir, that we have no definite reasons for thinking she has anything to do with it."

Old Townleigh glared at him, stroking his magnificent black beard and imparting to it a frightful, outraged majesty.

"Sometimes I think you are just a fool, young Harvey."

"I wish I thought that only sometimes, sir."

Harvey still felt, but in a lazy indefinite sort of way, that it was improper to bring Mrs. Abbey's name into this wretched affair. He did not like to do it, although his mind would often turn to her wonderfully, painfully. But he was not in the mood to argue about her with old Townleigh. Let the old boy think what he liked.

"Well, what are you going to do?" the old man asked impatiently.

"I've seen Starrilaw a few times," Harvey said. "He doesn't seem very hopeful."

"Hopeful! The man's paid not to be hopeful. I'll see him myself. Will you ask him to come and see me this afternoon if he has the time?"

Harvey reflected how curious it was that not one person who knew him and Lily Christine, not even suspicious old Townleigh, for a moment thought it possible that there

could be any foundation for the accusation against them. 'They might fancy that he was very attached to her, maybe that he was in love with her in the soft, silly way a man like himself would set about falling in love at his time of life—but he could have sworn it never had occurred to anyone that there was any harm in his feelings or that Lily Christine looked on him as anything but a friend.

And that sort of acceptance of the niceness between two suspected people was very precious to him, he was very grateful for it, it made him feel that the world was not such a bad place after all, that the Abbeys and Summerests of life were more than balanced by the decencies and graciousness of most people.

When he saw Townleigh again, later in the day, the old man looked very thoughtful.

"I've seen John Starrilaw," he said, not looking at Harvey but drawing monstrous patterns on a pink blotter with a giant blue pencil.

Harvey found he had actually to force himself to take an interest.

"Well?" he said.

The old man shot a glance at him, one of those dangerous, penetrating glances of his of which nobody who knew him well was ever afraid.

"Young Harvey, are you in love with Lily Christine?"

"No," Harvey said slowly. "I don't think I'd call it that."

"And what would you call it?"

"Well, I think about her a good deal . . ."

Old Townleigh sighed. "Unwise," he said. "Unwise."

"I'm not sure it's even that, sir. It's just more or less nothing." He added: "It began quite lately."

Old Townleigh sighed. "I know. It began by being sorry for her. It always does. We are all fools."

And he fell again to drawing patterns on the pink blotter.

"What made you ask, sir?" Harvey asked at last. "Not that I mind."

"You should not mind, young Harvey. I am thinking only of your good."

"I know. But what made you think of it?"

"I was just wondering. Something Starrilaw said. It appears that at first you were for defending this case."

"Yes, I was. For Muriel's sake."

"Of course. Did she want you to?"

"She has never said a word about it one way or the other. But I thought I'd defend in fairness to her."

"And how does she take all this?"

"It's very unpleasant for her, of course. But she understands."

"A good woman, Harvey - a grand woman!"

"She is, certainly."

"You're a lucky man to have a wife like that."

"Very."

All this time the old man was vaguely making patterns on the pink blotter. It looked an awful mess. Then, suddenly, he shot out one of those preposterously shrewd glances of his.

"Harvey, we have been friends a long time. Let us be fair and above-board with one another."

For the first time in days Harvey managed to fight himself out of the mist of unreality around him. He found himself surprised.

"Why, of course!" he said.

"Then you are not," the old man said, sternly eyeing him, "thinking of leaving Muriel?"

Harvey burst out laughing.

"Of all the suspicious old blokes!" he said. He could not stop laughing. The old man's knowingness

seemed to him so very funny. But it was a quickly collapsible sort of knowingness. And presently old Townleigh was grinning into his great black beard, with that comically hostile shamefacedness of his that prevented his friends from disliking him even after his worst moments.

"And how on earth," Harvey asked, "did you come by that idea, sir?"

"Because you are so infernally quiet! You quiet people get up to the queerest tricks. Still . . . I'm sorry I said that, young Harvey."

"Oh, that's all right, sir. But I assure you that Muriel and I have never been closer than we are now."

"Splendid. A remarkable woman, young Harvey."

The worst of old Townleigh was that when he made quite unnecessary remarks like that he did not instantly pass on to something else but waited for an answer, as though what he had said needed one.

"Very," Harvey said.

"Then the affair stands like this," the old man said thoughtfully, "that so I gathered from Starrilaw—you want to save Lily Christine all the unpleasantness you can?"

"Muriel and I both feel like that, sir. But it's doubtful if I can be of any use."

"I gather that was what made you change your mind about defending—to save her unpleasantness?"

"That and the fact that it's apparently not much use. We wouldn't get anywhere, as the case stands."

"How's that?"

"Didn't Starrilaw tell you? About Coghill?"

"And who is Coghill?"

"Summerest's valet. A charming fellow. Coghill rather brings the case home, you see, sir."

"I'm afraid I don't. How home?"

"As long as the evidence was kept to that night in the country, I didn't mind defending. But then along comes this Coghill fellow and says I've been in the habit of spending hours alone with his mistress in her bedroom."

"So!" said old Townleigh thoughtfully. "Which is true, eh?"

It was curious to Harvey, the way the words came out of him quite mechanically and yet arranged in more or less reasonable order. He had not the faintest interest in them.

"Yes, I've been alone with her in her bedroom--several times. But--"

"Of course! So has everyone else, eh?"

"You know her habit, sir--receiving in her bedroom."

"And quite proper. But might look bad in the divorce court, eh?"

"Yes, casual. That's Starrilaw's point. The defence would naturally be that Mrs. Summerest usually received her friends in her bedroom, sometimes in bunches, sometimes alone--"

"And sometimes dressed--unconventionally?"

"I suppose so. I've never noticed."

"One can imagine the cross-examination, eh? Counsel trying to prove she lived an utterly immoral life."

"Yes. And how it would look to people brought up to believe--as I was, too--that our betters are no better than they should be. The connection between 'bedroom' and 'men' and 'smart lady' in a respectable mind is--well, significant, isn't it?"

"I don't know. I haven't a respectable mind."

"You must take my word for it, sir, Starrilaw says that in no time there would be every kind of dirty story about Mrs. Summerest around the town."

"Why? Divorces aren't reported in detail."

"This isn't a usual case--dealing with the great

Summerrest and his wife. There is bound to be a lot of interest and talk."

"Yes, a first-rate news story."

"Besides, after all that mud slinging—we should still be nowhere."

"You mean, she wouldn't stand a chance anyway?"

"So I gather. It's a funny world, sir."

"Funny! I'm glad you think so."

"And there's another point—she doesn't want to stop him getting his wretched divorce."

"How do you know that?"

"Well, it's easy to guess. Starrilaw and Parwen think so too, and they know her better than I do. She is worried about this only for my sake."

"You both seem to be worried about this only for each other's sakes."

"I have to think of Muriel as well. But naturally I'm worried about Mrs. Summerrest, because I happen to like her."

"And she is worried because she happens to like you?"

"Not quite that, I'm afraid. Though of course I think she likes me well enough. But it's that extraordinary loyalty she has to the idea of friendship----"

"Yes, I know. She is very loyal."

"That's what is upsetting her so about all this—the idea she has that I'm being let down. Otherwise, I'm positive she wouldn't lift a finger to spoil the fellow's game."

"Another good woman who loves a rascal, I larvey. I'm afraid you are right about not defending, as the affair stands. Very disagreeable for you."

"Well, I suppose it will blow over in time. What I can't stand about it is, though, the idea of Summerrest getting away with murder."

"Yes, it's unfortunate. The prejudice will be all against Lily Christine, too. Well, it's understandable.

No matter what she is like really, she falls only too easily into the category of ' flighty young society beauty ' who might be up to anything behind an indulgent husband's back—whereas our friend Summercrest is almost a national figure and will be sympathized with as a man who has been consistently deceived by his wife while he was engaged in upholding the prestige of British sport."

"It makes one a bit giddy, doesn't it?"

"It's understandable, young Harvey. Prejudice always backs the fellow who is *useful*. It wouldn't matter if it was tennis he played, or polo. La-de-da games. But we can't have one of our greatest figures in a national sport held up as the cad you and I know him to be. We don't want to believe he is a cad. Whereas his wife—"

"Doesn't apparently matter. Nice for her."

"No good letting it make you bitter, young Harvey. And don't let it spoil your judgment. As you know, I sympathize with Lily Christine—completely—but I'm bound to tell you I find the public attitude quite understandable."

"Yes, I suppose it is. But what I can't understand is this, sir—won't this shabby business hurt his popularity among the people who know how unfaithful he has always been to her?"

"Among the women, it might."

"But surely in his clubs!"

"Oh come, young Harvey! You don't want to Americanize us!"

"Well, I never knew before that America had a corner in decency as well as in gold!"

"I'm not talking about decency but about that namby-pamby idealization of women they go in for—and all it has done for them has been to breed a race of confoundedly unpunctual women. No, the fellow's clubs won't turn against him. Why should they? America may be a beauty

parlour for women financed by overworked millionaires whose only recreation is telling endless anecdotes—but England still remains a man's country—in spite of votes for women and flappers and the Lord-knows-what. Summerest will be all right."

" You mean that what he is doing would be quite impossible in America ? "

" Socially, quite. They have other hypocrisies. Good night to you, young Harvey."

" Good night, sir. By the way, I suppose this rather knocks that editorship on the head ? "

" I'm afraid so. But we'll see what we can do. You are a good fellow, young Harvey. Guileless, that's all, guileless. Good night to you."

Throughout this time, while Lily Christine was away in the country, Harvey was more than usually relieved to get home in the evenings, to sit by the fire with an open book in his hand. Of course Lily Christine was continually in his mind, but he was not distressed by her. He had got himself in some sort of order now, he no longer felt mean toward both Muriel and her. His soul was captive, he knew that now. His soul was captive, he was born to a captive life, and that was all there was to it. He did not want anything of Lily Christine—he, as a man, in his captive soul, did not.

But something in him wanted her continually; some hitherto unknown and sacred loneliness reached out to her. For all men, no matter how contented, have a secret, sacred loneliness. And Lily Christine was the mistress of his. His soul was captive, but his loneliness was a footstool for the image of Lily Christine.

So she walked in his thoughts, unconcerned with him, heedless of him. He never imagined her as taking the faintest interest in him. He watched her—contentedly, for he knew his soul was captive to his way of life. And,

watching her, his wonder took wings. "It is a rare blessing to be a man, and to feel the stir of beauty."

So she went her way in his mind, thinking her sad, far-away thoughts. And he was indescribably stirred by the loyalty that burned so defiantly in her.

During this time Muriel was very quiet and very wise. They let each other largely alone. He knew, of course, that she was not happy, but he knew too that her unhappiness was not against him, that it flowed with the tide that bore them both to a friendly shore.

It was no good fidgeting, that was what they both felt. And although they said so little, their understanding of one another was complete throughout this time, they never had been so close to one another.

He still did not say anything to her about Mrs. Abbey. He thought it better not. Besides, what concern of theirs was Mrs. Abbey? All the same, the actress was often in his mind, painfully. He could not accustom himself to this new murky idea of her as a wrecker. He tried to put it away from him, but it would always come back, fascinating him with its queerly unexpected murkiness and selfishness. Yes, it was a funny world.

One day he met Ambatriadi for luncheon at a club towards the middle of St. James's Street, on the sober side. It was a club of the old traditions, that is to say it did not, like many London Clubs of the day, admit forgers, card-sharpers and blackmailers, which was no doubt why it was not much frequented.

Harvey found Ambatriadi alone in the smoking-room. He was sitting very erect in a small chair, his long, handsome, sombre face looking more ravaged than ever. But the instant he saw Harvey he came striding across the room to greet him, shaking him warmly by the hand without saying a word. On his table there was a cocktail glass, empty.

"Daisy?" Harvey smiled.

Ambatriadi said that the next would unfortunately be Robinson. How hoarse his voice was, how smoky, as though forced up through the rubble of countless dissipations. What was it that was driving this decent man to this stupid and destructive indulgence? So erect and correct he was, so thoughtful for others, a kind man and an ungrudging friend. There was a worried, tormented kindness in the gentle brownness of his tired eyes. But on himself he had no mercy, wrecking his health in this silly wanton way.

"Have you heard anything from Lily Christine?" Harvey asked, over luncheon.

"I had a letter the other day."

Harvey felt a pang go through him. Still, Ambatriadi was the older friend.

"A very curious letter," Ambatriadi added, looking gloomily at the slice of cold meat on his plate. He was one of those men who always choose their food very carefully and are always inclined to doubt the wisdom of their choice.

"Curious?"

"I'll tell you a thing, Harvey—it has been worrying me. I only wish I could tell you what it was about."

After that they talked very little. Harvey half hoped that Ambatriadi would say something about Mrs. Abbey; he actually wanted to talk of Mrs. Abbey that day, to get her clearer in his head. But, of course, just because he wanted to talk of her for once, the man never so much as mentioned her name.

It was a grey cold day, a day for walking. Harvey said he was going to walk back to Fleet Street, anyhow part of the way, and Ambatriadi, quickly swallowing a double-brandy, decided to accompany him.

They walked quickly, not talking, and soon came

amongst the anxious, preoccupied, loitering crowds in the Strand. The people in the Strand always gave Harvey that impression ; they did not seem to be busy about anything in particular, not even in looking at the shop windows, but they had a faintly unclean air of expectancy.

As they were passing Mrs. Abbey's theatre Harvey saw by the posters that there was a matinée. How and why he came by his sudden decision to go in, he did not stop to think. His work could wait for that afternoon. He wanted to get the woman clearer in his head.

"I think I'll go in," he said diffidently, feeling he was being stupid.

"But we've seen the rubbish!" Ambatriadi said gloomily. All the same, he followed Harvey in.

It amused Harvey, the similarity between the Greek and himself. Ambatriadi, for all his impatience, would always be doing things at the suggestion of others. He would always turn back to walk with a friend whom he met in the street, rather than the friend turn back with him. Well, they made a fine pair. A man who knew his mind would have them both under his thumb in a moment.

There were no places nearer than the back row. The theatre seemed to be full of middle-aged women. Harvey noticed that they were mostly of Muriel's sort, not the giddy smart ones. Then there were the very young and the very old. They all looked at Mrs. Abbey with eager, intent sympathy, ready to laugh with her or cry with her. They understood her, that was it. She was magical to them, but not mysterious. She was the beauty of accustomed things raised alone by genius for them to admire. If they too could be great, they would rather be great like Mrs. Abbey than in any other way.

But they would not be like Lily Christine, not for anything would they be like her. Lily Christine was suspect to them. She might be "all right," but she gave the

wrong impression. She walked unwarily, not dreaming that it would occur to anyone to think ill of her. And so they thought ill of her. She was not careful. You had to be pretty careful in this world. To be innocent was not enough. St. Francis would not be looked on as a saint these days. He'd give a wrong impression.

Innocence must watch, must guard, must be careful. Innocence must be subtle to be believed in. Innocence must smoke a pipe, just as other men did. It was a crafty business, innocence. You had to look out, be careful, keep a hold on yourself, not be different from others—except in a traditional, acceptable way. You had to plot and plan for people's good opinion. It didn't do to trust them until you were certain they were on your side. You had to get them on your side, or you were done. You had to *work* at people, as Mrs. Abbey did. You had to work at them, do what they expected you to do, flatter them into thinking you were like them at bottom and had risen through sheer hard work and purity of motive. And then you had your reward—you were not only one of the great ones but one of the *real* ones. It was difficult not to get giddy, once you began thinking about things. If you were born with a belief in people's trustfulness—they soon taught you to trust them! If you were born with the suspicion that people weren't going to trust you further than they could see you, and if you worked at them cleverly and craftily to make them think well of you—then they would never believe a word against you—they would call anyone who so much as criticized you a "crank" or a "cad."

He must have been staring at the fellow's profile for quite a while before he realized with a start who it was. Summercrest was in the row in front of them, a little to the side. Harvey could see his fine stern profile quite easily. There he was, the "fellow." He was alone,

disconnected from the people about him, unaware of them, brooding. He never took his eyes from the stage. He sat there, closed up, brooding, a man alone. There he was, big and fresh and fine-featured, a man any woman would like for a brother or a lover.

" See him ? " he whispered to Ambatriadi.

" Oh, leave me alone ! " snapped that queer troubled man.

An upright, unguarded sort of fellow, that was how Summerest looked. One of the unwary ones, you would have said, with his head high above stealthy opportunities. One of the good fellows.

CHAPTER XV

HARVEY'S breath came quickly. A longing to hurt the man overwhelmed him. He would gladly have done anything, endured anything, to see him defeated, humiliated. If only Summerest could see himself, how that would hurt him. He must be made to see himself, must. Or didn't he see himself and loathe himself as it was, and wasn't that why Lily Christine had that deep, undefeatable pity for him?

There he sat, his clumsy, blundering back towering above his seat, his clean fine head held high, indifferent to everything about him but what he wanted. And the man had grace, there was a look of grace on him. As a man to look at, he was an expression of something almost noble, an expression of beauty almost achieved.

He must speak to the fellow. He had to speak to him, out of the cold hard anger in him. What he would say to him he did not know, but he must speak to him.

Ambatriadi refused even to glance in Summerest's direction. He had a fine nervous capacity for contempt which Harvey, smiling, envied him.

Summerest did not move during the intervals, nor so much as look about him, so Harvey had to wait for the play to end. It had seemed to him ignoble rubbish a few nights before, but now he found it almost unbearable. And he felt a sense of shame in watching Mrs. Abbey go through her tricks of good fellowship. But she fascinated him ; he could not take his eyes off her for long. What he had formerly admired as her radiance now seemed to him something clayey and unwholesome, she seemed to him

clayey, there was something disgusting about her fair loveliness. But she fascinated him.

"I want to say a word to Summerest," Harvey said, at the end.

Ambatriadi looked gloomy, like a great gloomy bird.

"What's the use," he muttered hoarsely.

All the same he lingered with Harvey in the broad entrance passage. His sense of friendship would not let him leave a friend to face any kind of unpleasantness without support. He moved a little way off as Summerest approached, and stood examining a large coloured photograph of Mrs. Abbey as Rosalind.

Summerest lounged forward, distinct in the fussy crowd. Yes, he was a figure. He had on a soiled tweed suit, a club tie so faded that the colours were indistinguishable, and a battered felt hat with the brim turned down. He looked tough, but at the same time "right"; you couldn't mistake the fellow for anything but a gentleman. Well! It made a man giddy, trying to make people out.

He did not seem in the least surprised to see Harvey waiting for him. He did not seem to be aware of Harvey, really.

"I want to speak to you," Harvey said. His anger was cold, it would *not* flame up. It made him feel a fool, incapable.

"Got something to dislike me for at last, haven't you, Harvey?"

There was a subtle grin in Summerest's eyes, but it was deep down, deeper than the usual bitter mockeries between man and man.

"Let's get out of here," Harvey said.

As they moved on with the thinning crowd they came up to Ambatriadi.

"How do, Andy?"

Ambatriadi looked straight ahead of him with a sort of tormented exasperation.

"I don't want to speak to you, Summerest. This is Harvey's affair."

Summerest lounged on, his hands in his pockets. He looked utterly unaware of everything about him.

They were outside, on the crowded pavement. It was raining. Summerest stopped, vaguely. People had to swerve aside to get by the big man.

"If we were in your country, Andy, Harvey would have put a knife in me by now, eh?"

Ambatraidi gave a hoarse laugh.

"I'll tell you a thing, Summerest—unfortunately, Greece is a republic now, and with your charming character you would be in the government."

Summerest had a way of laughing slowly with his unaware blue eyes; laughter slowly dawned in them, as a peasant's laughter does.

"You're a good fellow, Andy."

Ambatraidi said to Harvey: "Shall I wait for you?" When Harvey said he thought better not, he abruptly shook his hand and strode away.

They followed him, slowly. Summerest seemed incapable of walking fast. He lounged along, his hands deep in his pockets, unaware, brooding, obstructing everyone. People had to walk round him, looking at him resentfully. He did not notice them.

"It's no good, Harvey," he said slowly. "I'm not going to discuss this business."

"Oh, aren't you!" Harvey said, suddenly trembling with excitement. "You're going to hear what I think of you, anyhow."

Summerest lounged on, never looking at him, apparently unaware of him. Harvey felt his anger was betraying him, was dwindling into a fussy, childish excitability.

"It's not necessary, my boy," Summerest said indifferently. "Besides, I'm not interested."

"That's your look out, not mine," Harvey said, trying to sound calm. "I *am* interested, I can tell you."

"It's just this, Harvey—I don't want to be bothered with you."

"You don't seem to mind bothering me, do you?"

"Yes, it's bad luck. I'm sorry for it."

The big lounging man stopped suddenly, disrupting the flow of people on the pavement. They were a few yards past the narrow passage leading to the stage door of Mrs. Abbey's theatre.

"If you're sorry for it," Harvey said, trying not to be shrill, "why the devil don't you behave yourself?"

A puzzled, worried look passed over Summerest's face. He seemed to be really aware of Harvey for the first time.

"Look here, Harvey, what is the good of this? Do stop nagging at me! Why force yourself on a man? I've got nothing to say to you."

And Harvey's anger simply would not be worthy of the occasion; he could not raise it above an intensely nervous excitability.

"You look wretched enough, I must say," he said, jeering. "Anyone would be, I suppose, who preferred her"—he nodded to the theatre—"to Lily Christine."

"How do you know anything about her?" Summerest asked in his slow-moving voice.

"It's easy enough to guess. I suppose you've come slinking back to see her."

"See her?" Summerest repeated. And there was that subtle laughter at the back of his blue stare, deep down.

"She won't even see me," he said, as though the statement had a faint relation to a joke.

"Rot!" Harvey said, jeering.

"Well, I'll show you," Summerest said.

His profound absorption rejected Harvey as soon as he had spoken to him. He lounged away up the narrow

passage, and Harvey could do as he liked about following him. And Harvey followed, as though he was joined to the fellow by something. He felt that what he was doing was inevitable, planned out for him before he was born.

The stage-door man's face lighted up on seeing Summerest. He took the end of a dirty yellow pencil out of his mouth.

"Why, haven't seen you for a long time, sir!"

"No, I've been away. Just ring up Mrs. Abbey's room, will you, and ask her if she has a moment? But I fancy she's busy."

The stage-door man rang up and asked.

"Yes, sir, she's afraid she's busy."

Summerest turned to Harvey, there was a grin on his handsome face, a grin of profound amusement.

"There you are, young fellow," he said, grinning.

They walked down the narrow passage again, Summerest a little ahead.

"Why won't she see you?" Harvey asked.

"What?" Summerest said stonily.

"Why won't she see you?"

"Doesn't want to be mixed up in this mess."

"Sounds a pleasant woman."

"Sensible. Why not?"

Summerest was stony, quite uninterested. The man seemed to be defeated, to be moving in a darkness of defeat. But he did not care, he let the thing happen to him. He would not fight, he would not do anything, he let his fate happen to him. And his fate was to get what he wanted and to be defeated in his soul. So he let the passion of defeat swallow him up, he let himself go to it, lost himself in the darkness of his selfishness.

The rain was pelting down now, a downpour. The Strand was a roar of slimy movement, greasily alight. It was like a giant sewage pipe, choked up with all the

muck of London, lit by jeering lights. A stale wet odour rose up from the struggling, hurrying crowds.

Summerest lounged through them, as unaware of their resentment as he was of the pelting rain. He had no overcoat, and in no time the shoulders of his old worn suit were black and sodden with rain.

Harvey kept his eyes open for an unoccupied taxi, but he could not see one. He had on a thick overcoat. Somehow it worried and exasperated him that Summerest was getting wet through.

"I'm giving up first-class cricket," Summerest said in his slow-moving voice.

What a world! Cricket! And at the same time this poor anxious, struggling crowd fumbling through the rain.

"There's nothing in the papers," Harvey said.

"Will be, next week. Going in for politics."

"Good God! Why?"

"She wants me to," Summerest said.

"Conservative?"

"I suppose so." Summerest grinned slowly. "It's supposed to be the respectable party, isn't it?"

"You will be quite an acquisition, Summerest."

"Why?"

"God only knows *why*! But one has noticed there's something pleasing to people in the idea of a cricketer in politics. Makes them think politics must be quite honest."

"Be a lot of la-de-da in the papers, I suppose. Fancy me as a politician, Harvey?"

"Well, you never know."

"Meaning I'm a swine and therefore certain to get on?"

"More particularly, that you don't look the swine you are—you inspire confidence—and so you will probably be as successful in your line as Mrs. Abbey is in hers."

"Thanks for the flowers," Summerest said, grinning.

At last Harvey saw an unoccupied taxi and just managed to catch the man's eye.

"I'll drop you, if you like," he said. "You are wet through."

Summerest climbed in clumsily, giving him an address in Curzon Street. The taxi went carefully on the greasy crowded streets. They were held up by interminable blocks. The two men sat silent. Summerest was indifferent, closed up, brooding. But somehow Harvey could not help feeling joined up to him; there was some queer thing joining them.

There was something subtle in Summerest's brooding unawareness, subtle and spidery. He caught you. He sat there closed up, brooding, and he caught you. Some infernal thing came out of him and wrapped itself around you and joined you to him in a messy, mysterious sympathy. Oh, he was a devil. There was some awful, insidious, spidery, human-ness in the man, which entered into you and took you from yourself and made you the ally of his defeated soul.

Harvey, sitting beside him without a word, fought him with all his might. He would *not* be caught by the fellow's spidery human-ness. He wanted passionately to down him, to strip him of his brooding unawareness. He would *not* leave the fellow until he had downed him somehow.

So when the taxi stopped he followed Summerest on to the pavement. There outside a small house toward the middle of Curzon Street.

"Coming in?" Summerest said. And that deep slow-moving laughter lurked at the back of his blue stare.

"I've still got something to say. Are you living here?"

"Yes, staying with Tarlyon. Know him?"

He opened the door with a latchkey.

Only, don't nag at me, Harvey, or I might throw you out of a window."

" I'm not going to nag."

" Just be a bright companion for a tired man, eh ? "

" Tired, are you ? "

" Always am, when I haven't had enough exercise.
Well, come in and have a drink."

Upstairs, in a long, comfortable room, a room with a deep crust of good living on it, a man was sitting by the fire, reading. He closed his book as they came in. He was a blond, red-faced man, very easy in his manners. His eyes were bright blue in his brick-red face. They kept on glinting with amusement, like a schoolboy's with a girl he is teasing. A coarse man he looked at first, but presently you saw that there was something fine-textured in him, something in him that rejected the commonplace. So you instinctively showed him the best of you, even while you were wondering why you should.

" Where have you been, Ivor, I've been waiting for you ? "

" I went to a matinée."

Summerrest introduced Harvey. On hearing the name Tarlyon stared a moment, then his eyes glinted with amusement. Harvey liked him, was quite comfortable with him. But he felt suspended, waiting to be alone with Summerrest.

Tarlyon got up, and stretched himself. He smiled at Harvey pleasantly.

" Well, if you two are going to quarrel ! " he sighed.

" I've brought Harvey in to have a drink," Summerrest said indifferently.

Tarlyon nodded toward a small table. " Help yourself. I'm afraid I must go out. Coming later, Ivor ? "

" No, I don't feel like a game this evening."

" Then I'll see you at dinner."

Tarlyon, went out very pleasant in his easy, careless way. Harvey liked him, his easy manners, his soldierly

good looks, and at the back of him that rather fine-textured flair for rejection. He would like to know Tarlyon better. Mrs. Abbey couldn't make a man like that swallow anything. He would be up to her tricks in a moment. He would amuse himself with any pretty woman who was fool enough to let him, but he would take seriously none but the first-rate.

Harvey took a long whiskey-and-soda, and drank it with deep satisfaction. It steadied him. He wanted to explain himself to the fellow.

"If you think," he began, "that I'm fashed about this business for my own sake—you never were more mistaken in your life."

Summerest, lounging deep in the chair Tarlyon had vacated, stretched his feet out to the fire and stared at them.

"Wish you would shut up," he said moodily. "Wish to God I hadn't come back to London."

That fellow Tarlyon had somehow left behind him an air of easiness. Harvey felt almost detached from his predicament, the Summerest affair.

"Well, why did you?" he asked.

Summerest grunted moodily, staring at his feet.

"Lily Christine wrote to me I must see her. I thought it only fair."

"Fair!" Harvey laughed. "That's a good one from you, Summerest."

Summerest slowly turned his eyes to him in a long, stony stare, as though considering him. You could see that the fellow had a slow, wicked temper.

But Harvey felt quite at his ease now. He exulted in the feeling that he had at last got the fellow, had collared him, the blundering hulk.

"It's a funny thing," Summerest said out of his stony stare.

"What is ? "

"A damn funny thing ! " Summerest said slowly, with his unwavering blue stare on him.

"This is cloquence ! " Harvey grinned. He knew what the fellow was driving at.

"It's just struck me, Harvey, that people who dislike us make us feel a hell of a lot worse than we actually are. You make me feel a criminal, and glad of it."

Harvey grinned, exulting in the power of his dislike over the fellow. At the same time he felt that Summerest was a fool to be taken in by it. For his dislike was poor stuff at bottom, incapable stuff. He mustn't show that, though.

"I'm going to talk to you about Lily Christine, he said.

"I'll be damned if you are," Summerest said, but without a trace of feeling. "Finish your drink, Harvey, and clear out, I've got nothing to say to you."

"The point is," Harvey said easily, sitting down, "what is she going to say to you ? Any idea, Summerest ? "

The fellow was full of spidery surprises. A smile spread slowly over his brooding face.

"What's the joke ? " Harvey asked.

"You are, young fellow. You're such a fool. I suppose you think she wants me back ? "

Harvey waited, his mind collaring Summerest, intent to down him for all his spidery subtlety.

"She wouldn't have me back," Summerest said to the fire, "as a gift. She's given me up. Get that into your comic head, young fellow."

"Don't you think she loves you any more ? "

"Love ? Who said anything about love ? "

"Well, you might give it a thought now and then, don't you think ? "

" If you're trying to be clever, I'm sorry I can't follow you. All I say is, I don't see what love has got to do with it. She's just given me up, that's all."

" How do you know ? "

" Well, don't I know *her* ? I've failed—so she's through with me."

" In friendship ? "

Summerrest yawned.

" That's about it. She won't—can't—forgive that. Now run off home."

Harvey leant forward, intent on Summerrest.

" Yes—but she hasn't failed in friendship to you, Summerrest. See the point ? And she won't fail in friendship—to me. That's another point. Makes things difficult for you, doesn't it ? "

Again Summerrest slowly turned his eyes to him from the fire. And again that deep, slow-moving laughter lurked at the back of his blue stare.

" You're a comic, Harvey. How do you mean ' makes things difficult for me ' ? "

" You'll see soon enough. When she talks to you."

" She'll talk about you. I'm ready for that."

" Are you ? You'll see."

" All right, all right ! Now stop bothering me, there's a good boy, and go home to your mammy."

" You're ready for her when she talks about the mess this is getting me into, about her letting me down as a friend—aren't you ? "

" I don't give a damn for the mess you are in. Well ? "

Harvey grinned. Now he'd got the fellow where he wanted him.

" Exactly, Summerrest ! And the point is—nor do I ! "

" Oh, don't you ! Reckless fellow."

" That's why I'm warning you—not to attach any importance to what she says about letting me down.

She will tell you that what she minds most of all in this business is that I, who offered her hospitality in all innocence, am entangled in it. But I am telling you that I don't mind."

"And I'm telling you that I don't care if you mind or not."

"You will care. For that leaves you and your wife alone in this business. You aren't hurting me. You are hurting only her—banging at her and hitting her."

"Oh, shut up, Harvey! You go on talking. . . ."

"You'll see, Summerrest—You won't have a leg to stand on. But she doesn't want you to know that—she loves you and doesn't want you to know what a swine you are being to her. I don't see how you can help feeling it, but women are funny. So she won't talk to you about herself, how you are hurting her. She won't say anything about the way you are—trampling on her. All she will talk about will be me and the harm you are doing me. But you will know that I don't mind—"

A cold, staring anger looked out of Summerrest's eyes.

"You are only *saying* that, man! *You* don't mind! Do you think I can't see through a tuppenny-halfpenny journalist who's afraid of his own shadow?"

Harvey smiled, quite certain of himself and of the impression he was making on the fellow.

"You know I'm talking the truth, Summerrest—that I don't mind about myself, because I'm in love with her—"

"You would be—in your squeamish, anaemic way!"

"Yes, it's all that. But she doesn't know it, wouldn't believe it. Still, that's not the point; I only told you to show why I don't mind about myself. The point is that she will only appeal to you for my sake—and you can stand that easily, can't you?"

"I should think so! What the devil do you matter?"

"Exactly my point, Summerest. But you would feel fine, wouldn't you, if she began appealing to you for herself, if she began showing you the pain you were giving her and how she still loved you?"

"Great talker, aren't you, Harvey!"

"But you needn't be frightened, Summerest—she won't do that, just because she does love you and doesn't want to hold you to her against your will. Still, you are in for a bad time. I'm almost sorry for you. While she is talking to you about me, you will know that I'm not of any importance in this thing at all, that you and she are alone in it, that in the intimacy of your two selves you are torturing her as a cruel kid would a kitten when he thought nobody was looking. Yes, you've got a fine time ahead of you. And try to get it into your head that as far as I am personally concerned—you can do what you damn well like about it."

And Harvey, lightened of what he had to say, pleasantly easy in his mind, went to the door. He was not in the least worried by the fellow now. He couldn't be bothered with him any more. Summerest could get out of his musty hole or not as he pleased.

Then he heard Summerest's voice behind him, the slow-moving voice, jeering, elbowing him away, getting rid of him and his fancy talking for good and all.

"You're a darned clever fellow, aren't you, Harvey? Good journalist, I should say. There's only one thing you've forgotten—that she wouldn't have me back as a gift."

Harvey opened the door. He was quite indifferent to Summerest now. Only the fellow's spidery wriggling with the truth in his soul seemed to him pitiful.

"You'll see," he threw over his shoulder, indifferently. "Lying won't do you any good, Best of luck, Summerest."

CHAPTER XVI

 THAT night it was a long time before Harvey got to sleep. His thoughts flowed in a broad, unhurrying stream, carrying him with them as though he was nothing at all. What a masterful driver a man's mind can be, and how impotent a man is.

He couldn't be bothered with Summerest any more, that was certain. But the queer thing was that he suddenly knew that he was free of Lily Christine too, free of her for good. Yes, he had disentangled himself from the pattern of those two people's lives, from now on he was separate from them.

There was no sadness in this realization, nor yet any sense of relief. He hung suspended in a profound sense of his captivity, and it was this captivity that made him separate from those two. He was not of them, had nothing to do with them, for his soul was captive to his way of life, and his soul said : " You are separate from those people."

For they would be together again, he knew that. He knew everything lying in bed that night. Summerest needed Lily Christine to hold him together. He was no good, a daft, unsure sort of man rotting with contrary blood instincts. Do this, and he did it ; do that, and he did that too. And he, Harvey, was just the same, but he was anchored by his middle-class instincts. And she loved the fellow ; there was not a doubt of it. Something in her had recognized him as hers, she clung to him in her being, she was not complete without him. Yes, they would be together again. He had done her evil, but

what did that matter? His evil was part of her too, part of the dark twisting river that bore them to fulfilment. And so they would be together again.

But he, Harvey, must see to that. That was where he came in, for the last time. Well, you never knew where you were in this world. He, the undecided, the incapable, the captive must arrange other people's lives. For of the three, Summercrest and Lily Christine and himself, he was the strong one, in his new-found separateness from them.

In his inmost consciousness he was afraid of Lily Christine. And he knew that Summerrest must be too, and maybe that was why he was making this idiotic attempt to get away from her. Yes, in their inmost consciousness they were afraid of Lily Christine, the men who loved her. And this fear was like a flower, springing from the best soil in them. They were afraid of her because her standards were instinctive, not mental or emotional or traditional. She had a criterion, instinctively. And she lived up to it, instinctively, without effort. The others, her friends, most people, were outsiders in the real sense, no matter what they were socially. If she applied her own criterions to them, which she did not dream of doing, they were outsiders, impossible people. What impossible people they were really—he, Harvey, and the rest of them—fumbler, always fearful of the subconscious revolt in themselves against the meannesses they were born among and were used to. They were born hollow people, hollow, always waiting to be filled up with easy stuff, for easy things to be chucked into them. But you couldn't fill *her* up with the lies of tradition and prejudice and desire and comfort, with all the little daily corruptions of life. No, you couldn't.

His thoughts bore him on. He had to play a trick on Lily Christine. Yes, that was the way to put it. He had to play a trick on her. But, to begin with, he must not think

any more whether she liked him or not. In the sum of their lives, that did not matter any more. He had finished with all those fancies, had finished letting dreams charm him ; he and his captive soul were back in their burrow once more. But first he had to help those two back to their proper lives, since only he could do it. And he could do it only by standing away from her, by putting away from him the fear of her fine standards.

In the morning, although he knew she must be back in London to see Summercrest, he did not telephone to her. Imagining them together, Lily Christine and that fellow, he smiled grimly. The interview would come to nothing, of course. Lily Christine pleading with him to come to some other "arrangement," not to let her innocent friends in for this mess. Summercrest, with his spidery selfishness, listening stonily, quite indifferent to any suffering of Harvey's, thankful only that she did not use the one weapon that must weaken him. Oh, how thankful the fellow would be, in those inarticulate depths of his, that she did not plead with him for herself.

Well, that wouldn't last long. You always got paid back, in this world. You couldn't get away with murder. And that was where he, Harvey, came in. He'd teach the fellow to trample on people. Summercrest simply would not be able to withstand the appeal of her love for him. That was why he had slunk away to Paris. Poor devil, he had made a mistake in coming back. He was in for it now.

The difficulty was, of course, that you couldn't persuade Lily Christine to use such an argument. She wouldn't do it, couldn't, probably never had in the course of her marriage—use her love for the fellow to get anything out of him, any submission. Her other-world politics wouldn't let her use that kind of emotional argument. It wouldn't be fair, to her mind. Shabby,

she'd think it. It would be blackmailing him to come back to her. She wouldn't do it.

Well, she must be made to. There was a way he knew of. It wasn't pleasant, but what did that matter? He would never see her again. Anyhow, she would never see him.

As for Mrs. Abbey, Harvey could give her scarcely a thought. Mrs. Abbey was a clayey sort of dream. She would pass, leaving a sticky patch. She was full of traditional trickeries, in short a woman who knew the world, and so in the end she would make the best of a bad job. She would yet be Summerest's mistress, if she wanted him enough, giving him her clayey beauty on the sly. No, that wouldn't do. There was no sense in being unfair. She was a good woman, there was no denying that. She was good, undoubtedly. She wouldn't give way to the fellow if she could help herself. She would try not to give way to him. She'd do her damnedest to keep the fellow at a distance. And you would think, having so strong a character, she could do that easily. But it was just those strong-minded women who couldn't in the end withstand the ruthless fascination of weak men like Summerest. It was silly to think of her as lewd or anything like that. She was a narrow, upright woman with a streak of righteous cruelty in her. The Puritan coming out in the shop girl. And on top of that she had a reputation to keep up.

He knew Lily Christine would come to see him that day, after she had seen Summerest. It was a Saturday. He left Fleet Street early in the afternoon and was in his study by four o'clock. He had some work to do for Monday's paper, and settled himself at his writing-table to do it. Muriel was out with a friend at a matinée.

Before shutting himself into the study he told the maid

to show Mrs. Summerest in as soon as she came. He pictured her coming in, let himself go to the thought of her. Well, this was the last time he would let dreams charm him.

She would come in and across the room to him very quickly, her enormous eyes, heart-searching in their clear bright blindness, aiming for him, not realizing him, at last lighting on him with a fleeting glance at her own stupidity. And she would give him a sense of whiteness, tenseness. Rather cold she would be, too busy with the idea of him to notice him personally with great warmth. He hoped that under her fur coat she would be in a black frock she had, black with a low open collar of creamy white. He knew she would never see him again, that this was the last time.

And she came, and she went, and he was left so witless he did not know what to do. He was left decentralized, having no centre in himself but only in what she must be thinking of him. And what was she, the slim, quick figure striding away from him, thinking of him? Dear God, what could she help *but* think of him!

A few minutes was all she stayed with him, for all the way she had settled herself down to talk to him with the full, sad seriousness or trusting friendship. No, she was not cold, but gave herself to him in all the trusting warmth of friendship. So what he had to do was made more difficult than ever. Well, it was a funny world. Nothing was ever made easy for you. That is, nothing worth doing. And wasn't this worth doing? Wasn't it just! Her happiness.

As she sat down her fur coat slipped from her shoulders and showed the black frock with the low open collar of creamy white. He was so glad of that, although he couldn't bring himself to look at her but furtively.

She told him that she had just left Ivor, and how he had been as she had feared he might be, hiding himself from behind that profile of his. And so she simply had not been able to get *at* him.

She was sad, without a smile in her. She did not belittle her failure, did not belittle the hopelessness of the dilemma her friend was in through her fault. She was sorry, she said.

Then Harvey said what he had planned to say. He played his trick. Listening to his own words, they appalled him so much he almost broke down. It was like putting his thumb down on the friendship that was between them and pressing it down as hard as he could, leaving a nasty smudge instead of a friendship.

How she looked at him, with a queer, frightened surprise!

He could not bear it ; his plot almost collapsed. But somehow he managed to go heavily on, driving her back to the fellow by telling her that he, Harvey, on thinking the whole thing over, had come to the conclusion that it really was too hard on him and his wife to be entangled in her affairs in this troublesome way.

Yes, "troublesome" was the word he used.

Well, he had finished letting the dreams charm him. He would do the thing properly while he was about it. "In this troublesome way . . ."

Her fine dark eyebrows, curved so faintly, contracted for an instant.

"I know," she said, "I know."

Then she sat very still, thoughtful. He could not look at her, began playing with a paper weight.

He existed only in her thoughts of him. It was terrible, the clearness with which he saw himself in her thoughts of him as she sat there, very still, thoughtful. It was terrible, terrible.

As for the part of him that was speaking, that didn't exist, but in her thoughts of him he was alive and quivering with pain. Oh, it was terrible.

She was proud, he said, and was sacrificing him to her pride.

And he made himself look at her, to lend conviction to his words. She sat very still, thoughtful. She did not say anything at all.

"You see," he said, "I've been thinking this thing over day and night since I last saw you—and I've come to a conclusion. The only conclusion." He played with the paper-weight, not looking at her. "Need I tell you what it is?"

"Go on, please," she said, so quietly that he scarcely made out the words.

Then, he said, the only way to stop this foolish business going any further was for her to sacrifice a little of her pride and tell Summerest that she loved him and could not let him go. Then, and only then, would he, Harvey, be let out of the muddle into which he had quite innocently fallen.

"Yes," she said quickly, "I see that. Only"

She stopped suddenly, seemed lost in thought.

"Yes?" he said, unable to look at her.

But she did not say anything more. She went away, very quickly.

He sat on at his writing-table, playing with the paper-weight. Suddenly he found he simply could not stay another moment in the room she had just left. There was a very faint perfume in the air, she was still in the room. Damn it all, what nonsense! But there she sat, very still, thoughtful. "I know," she said, "I know." And her fine dark eyebrows, curved so faintly, contracted for an instant.

He could not bear it, simply ran away from the picture.

He wandered into other rooms, glad that Muriel had not yet come home.

At his first words, how she had looked at him, with that queer, frightened surprise! So is a deer afraid of dogs. Yes, they were after her, those broken loyalties. Summerest had failed her in friendship, now he had failed her. "In this troublesome way," he had said. And so she was left with her loyalties stuck like swords in her heart.

He could not stay indoors, was too restless. He put on his overcoat and went out. The streets were glistening and greasy, but it was not really raining, just dribbling.

He walked quickly, not knowing or caring where he went. So *that* was over. He would not see her again. She wouldn't see him again, it would be too painful for her. Well, he could bear that. Wasn't there an end to all things? But what he could not bear was that she would try never to think of him, try to keep him from her mind as a memory not to dwell on.

And she had trusted him too, infinitely. Yes, she trusted her friends. But he had turned on her, showing his teeth. And she had not protested at all. "I know," she'd said, "I know." Why? What had she known?

The answer to that was terrible to him. She had known that he and she were different, that was it. That was why she had sat so still, lost in thought. After the first poignant surprise, she had been quite resigned to the difference between them. She had thought: "Yes, he is right, in his way." But his way was not her way. And it was not friendship's way. But she had been resigned to thinking: "Yes, of course it is troublesome for him to be implicated in my tangles. Of course." And so she had had nothing to say to it. He was right, of course. "I know," she'd said, "I know." Why should he be bothered with her troubles? It was troublesome for him, of course it was.

He tried to make out what she would be doing now, at this moment. Maybe she would be with Summerest. Why, certainly she would. Wasn't that why he had played this trick on her, to get her to go to the fellow and leave him not a leg to stand on by saying she could not bear this awful thing any more, that she loved him and could not let him go?

Suddenly he stopped dead, staring blankly down at the pavement. Good God, suppose Summerest had been right! He had never given the fellow's words a serious thought. Suppose he had been right in saying that she had finished with him for good, that she had let him go, that she could *not* take him back! Suppose the fellow had been right!

He must have been walking at a good pace before that thought stopped him; he could feel the sweat on his forehead. He stood there, staring blankly at the sodden pavement.

Well! What a fool he had made of himself! Holy Moses, what a blamed fool! He and his tricks. As though an incapable, silly ass like himself had it in him to play tricks on *anybody* with any success. Trying for her happiness—oh, indeed! And all he'd done had been to make a botch of the whole thing. Holy Moses, what a fool he was! He had left the one important point out of his calculations—entirely.

But it was no good making a fool of himself again by going to the other extreme, jumping to conclusions. He walked on slowly. After all, suppose Summerest had been talking through his hat. It was likely enough, Heaven knew. The fellow was up to all sorts of tricks, wriggling out of things in his spidery way. Well, it took some thinking out. This was what came of *his* interfering, of *his* thinking he could be of no use to anybody. But it was done now. What he had to do

next was to find out what sort of mess he had got everybody into.

He found he was by the Underground station at Knightsbridge. The clock pointed to a quarter to five. So only half an hour or so had passed since she had left him. She hadn't had much time yet, anyhow, in which to think things over. That was something.

What was it she had said when he had told her she must go to Summerest and tell him that . . . anyhow, what was it she had said?

"Yes," she'd said. "I see that. Only . . ."

Yes, "only . . ." He hadn't noticed that particularly at the time. "Only . . ." Well, that was a nasty one. It might mean anything. "Yes, I see that. Only . . ." It was a reservation, indefinite, incalculable, limitless. What the devil was he to make of it? "Yes, I see that. Only . . ."

But he knew what he had to make of it. He had been a prize fool, that's what he had to make of it.

And, in a flash, he saw what he must do now, at once. Ring her up and tell her the truth. Say he had talked nonsense to her. Say he had been trying to play a trick on her for her good without having considered the ins and outs of the thing carefully enough beforehand.

He ran to one of the telephone boxes in the Underground, got his coppers ready. "Yes," she'd said. "I see that. Only . . ." Well, that put the kybosh on Summerest for good and all, did that "only . . ." How the devil hadn't he seen that before? Summerest had put too much evil between him and her, he had sinned against everything that was between them, and so she could not go back to him. That was it, certainly. "Yes, I see that. Only . . . I can't go back to him, it's quite impossible. How could we make a life together again—after this—disloyalty?" Yes, that was it. She could forgive him,

she would love him always, but she must let him go, wishing him all happiness. He was no use to her any more, he had broken everything up. That was what that "only" meant.

When he got through, she was not in. At first he thought it was her voice answering, and a rush of words came to his lips, but it was only Hempel doing her confounded imitation. No, she was not in. Well, luck wasn't with him that day, obviously. Nor with her. But she might be in presently, Hempel said. He said he would try again in a while.

Should he try for her at Tarlyon's house, where the fellow was staying? But he was convinced she would not be with Summerrest. That "only . . ." put the kibosh on that pretty thoroughly. And to think that hadn't occurred to him before! If only he could get at her quickly, now, to tell her what a prize fool he was. It seemed to him so important to reach her quickly. She'd feel this so badly, with her reverence for friendship. What had she said, that very first night they had met, when he had suggested helping her drive back to Southampton? "Now that I like you, I don't feel so badly about being a nuisance to you?" Something like that. He *must* reach her quickly. But where was she? If he hadn't known that the Parwens were away for the week-end, he would have tried for her at their house.

But he might see if Ambatriadi was in, have a talk with him. The Hyde Park Hotel was just over the way. It was no good wandering about the streets like this, getting himself into a state. It would calm him to see Ambatriadi. There would be some comfort in talking to a man almost as incapable as himself. He would tell Ambatriadi the whole thing, too. Yes, he would.

Quite forgetting to ask at the desk if Ambatriadi was in, he found himself by the lift. He asked to be taken to the

top floor. Then he began a little aimless wandering up and down the passages. What a well-bred, spick-and-span place it was ! Everything just so, no noises from behind any of the closed doors, no bits of luggage cumbering the passages.

He had no idea of the number of Ambatriadi's rooms but he remembered how the door lay, at the end of a long corridor where there was a window from which you could see the Albert Memorial at a merciful distance. He knocked on a likely door, and Ambatriadi himself opened it as though he was Horatius defending the bridge.

" Harvey ! " he said, gloomily enough, still defending the doorway.

Harvey hesitated, nonplussed, not wanting to go in where he was not welcome.

" Come in, come in ! " Ambatriadi said hoarsely, turning back into the room.

Harvey did not take off his coat, though it was wet enough. He felt very embarrassed, like a small boy. He muttered something about happening to be passing.

" You've just missed Lily Christine, " Ambatriadi said, pacing about. " Or did you run across her downstairs ? "

Harvey stared at Ambatriadi foolishly. He felt an awful fool for having just missed Lily Christine. That sort of thing only happened to a born fool.

Ambatriadi took no notice of him, pacing about with his fine high nose stuck in the air.

So he had just missed her, had he ! Luck wasn't with him to-day, obviously. Nor with her. And so she had come straight to Ambatriadi. To her old true friend from the new false one. Well, wasn't it natural ? And what had she said to him ?

But you couldn't tell much from just looking at Ambatriadi, except that he was upset, nervous about something. He always was, though, so that didn't mean much. He

paced about, his hands clasped behind his back, his nose stuck in the air, looking haggard and worried to death.

"Have a drink?" he said, not looking at Harvey.

"Did she—did she say anything about me?" Harvey asked.

Oh, if only she had! If only she had hit out about him! He would have felt so much better. But she hadn't, of course.

"Only that she had to get you out of this mess somehow," Ambatriadi said, pacing about.

Yes, that would be her only idea—her only retaliation. She couldn't bear to be a nuisance to someone who wasn't a friend. Naturally.

Ambatriadi stopped dead in front of him and held him with those tormented, exasperated brown eyes of his. Harvey suddenly felt a wave of excitement sweep over him, joggle him. What was it now? What had happened?

"I'll tell you a thing, Harvey," Ambatriadi said hoarsely—and stopped.

What was it now? What happened here? What had this other incapable done to her?

"What is it, man?" he asked sharply.

Ambatriadi, with a crooked bony finger, tapped his forehead solemnly.

"Mad," he said, his brown eyes suffering intensely.

Harvey's nervous excitement swept him away. He took Ambatriadi by the lapels of his jacket and shook him. What had this other incapable done to her?

"What is this nonsense, Ambatriadi?"

"Oh, leave me alone! I mean the girl is off her head. Off—her—head. She suggested we should run away together."

"Run away?"

"Yes, run away!" Ambatriadi shouted angrily. Harvey could scarcely articulate in his nervous excitement. He stuttered.

"What did you do, man? What did you say?"

"He asks me what I said!" At the same time he looked anxiously at Harvey. "I believe I'm in the first stage of D.T.'s," he said.

"That's your look out," Harvey snapped. "What about Lily Christine?"

So this was what had come of his fine plotting! But what had the man said? This other confounded incapable.

"I talked sense to her," Ambatriadi said abruptly.

Suddenly all Harvey's excitement left him. He sat down, limp, empty, weary.

"Oh God!" he sighed.

Ambatriadi stared at him angrily. Harvey looked back, smiling idiotically. He really was too tired. So Ambatriadi had turned her away, too. A fine dance they had led her that afternoon—her friends.

"And what would *you* have done?" Ambatriadi shouted.

"Oh, exactly the same!" Harvey sighed. "That's the point."

Ambatriadi began pacing about again.

"Of course I talked sense to her," he said, so hoarsely that Harvey wished he would give a good cough and get rid of the ashes of a few million cigarettes.

"I'm not blaming you," he said mildly.

The dance they'd led her that afternoon—Summerrest and her two friends. Hunting her from one to the other of them—perplexing her, hurting her, failing her.

"What was I to do—take her at her word, like a cad?"

"Yes," Harvey said.

Ambatriadi looked at him angrily, but there was a shamefacedness about him too. Oh yes, he knew what a confounded incapable he was, never ready, never decided.

"Before she came here," Harvey said listlessly, "she was with me. I talked sense to her, too. Between us, we've given her plenty of sense this afternoon. In fact, we're so sensible I wonder we can bear to live in this world another moment."

Ambatriadi, who had stopped expectantly when he had begun speaking, turned away in terrific exasperation.

Harvey sat thinking listlessly. Oh yes, they had talked sense to her. Unfortunately, they had also proved to her that they weren't much good to her as friends. He saw her leaving Ambatriadi, quickly. Striding away down the passages with the soldier-of-fortune look, looking for the lift, missing it . . . utterly hopeless. But you wouldn't think it to look at her. You would think she was busy about something, intent, heroically swift.

So she had come to Ambatriadi to help her out, had she? Blind of her, very.

"Had she got her spectacles on?" he asked, thinking of her looking for the lift.

Ambatriadi said: "Oh, leave me alone! I didn't notice."

Harvey tried to think, as though it was a matter of great importance. Had she had her spectacles when she was with him. She hadn't had them on, certainly, but hadn't she had them in her hand? He fancied she had. Yes, he remembered she had. Playing with them absently, while she sat very still, thoughtful.

"Well, what did you actually say to her?" he asked. "You and your sense!"

"I'll tell you a thing, Harvey," the Greek said slowly, pacing up and down. "You and I can speak the truth to one another about Lily Christine because——"

"Yes, all right. We both love her. Of course. Much good that does her. Well?"

"Listen. What am I to say when she comes to me with a crazy idea like that? No, listen. She says she knows I'm very fond of her. And she's . . . queer, cold—"

"Yes, I know," Harvey said.

"Listen. I see at once she isn't in her right mind—of course—and yet can't help letting myself go for the first time in all the years I've known her. No, listen—"

"I *am* listening! How did you let yourself go?"

"How? I told her I loved her—as I've never loved anyone in my life. And then—"

"Good! I'm glad you told her that. Just what she needed to-day."

"Love!" said Ambatriadi, sweeping it away with a gesture of intense exasperation. "Rubbish! Humbug! What good is my love to her!"

"More good than your talking sense to her, anyhow. Go on, go on!"

"Then she says she has got you into this trouble—you and your wife—and that she is so unhappy about it she doesn't know what to do. And then she says a lot of things I don't understand. Off her head, you see. No, listen. Says she can just bear the idea of getting a friend into trouble because a friend's affection for her would help him to bear it—but what she simply can't face is being a bother to someone who has no real fondness for her. Lot of stuff like that, which I don't understand. And then she says I'm different because I've no wife, no responsibilities, nothing that a scandal can hurt—and also I'm fond of her, she says, which you aren't really. How did she get that idea, Harvey?"

"I don't know. Go on, man."

"Go on, man!" Ambatriadi echoed furiously, exasperated to the last degree. "What am I to go on about?"

What can I say to her except that I'm a drunken wreck, damn nearly a dipsomaniac, that I've only got one rotten lung——”

“I didn't know that ! ”

“Oh, what does it matter ! But what can I say to her except that I'm no good to man, woman or child, and that I'd rather see the woman I loved dead than——”

“Yes,” Harvey sighed. “Of course. . . .”

And he saw into Ambatriadi's heart. He knew Ambatriadi was lying to himself—as he himself would have lied. He knew Ambatriadi had been terrified at Lily Christine's proposal, that his mind and heart had simply dithered with fear of the unknown, of the change in his life, of the disruption of everything. The poor human fool.

Harvey stared at the floor, tired and listless. Ambatriadi was crying, tears were streaming down his hollow lined cheeks. He jabbed at his eyes with a handkerchief. Oh yes, he knew what a coward he was. And he loved Lily Christine.

Ambatriadi's tears did not put any constraint on Harvey. There was a deep warmth in him for the Greek. They were brothers, that was what he felt. A couple of romantic incapables. Their souls were captive. Their intentions were good, and that was all that could be said for them.

They must have been silent for some time when a knock on the door aroused Harvey. Ambatraidi appeared to hear nothing.

The door was just ajar. Harvey stared at it, as though fascinated. What was going to happen now ? A tingling expectancy swept over him. What was it now ?

Summerest stood in the doorway, looking at him eagerly. His forehead was glistening with sweat.

“Summerest ! ”

"I've been looking for you. Rang you up—office, home. Thought I'd try here."

The fellow spoke quickly, tensely. He came into the room. And he moved quickly, too. Summerest the athlete, the boys' hero. An intense excitement flowed through the big, clumsy body.

"How do, Andy? Sorry to intrude."

Ambatriadi, staring out of the window, did not so much as turn his head.

CHAPTER XVII



SUMMEREST pulled a sheet of paper out of his pocket and held it out to Harvey. His forehead glistened with sweat. He must have run up all those stairs, not waiting for the lift.

"What's this mean?" Summerest asked, holding out the sheet of paper.

Harvey, still sitting, stared up at the fellow, trying to take him in. What was he up to now? What was this new spidery trick? His blue eyes were as hard as stones, no give in them. But there was a quivering somewhere about the big body, a quivering excitement.

"Go on, man, read it!"

Harvey slowly took the sheet of paper. But he still stared up at Summerest, taking him in. The fellow was afraid, that was it—quivering with fear.

The note was in pencil, a scrawl.

"I can't bear this way of doing things any longer, darling. What a pity you won't see sense. I think I'm acting for the best. Good-bye—old cart-horse! Be happy, bless you."

Summerest stood mopping his forehead with a handkerchief. His cold blue eyes never left Harvey's bent head. His body moved uneasily.

"Well?" he said.

Harvey felt the fellow's slow anger lurking at the back of his eyes. He wanted Harvey to satisfy, soothe him. And Harvey did not feel like hurrying himself about it.

He went on staring at the pencilled scrawl. Let the fellow simmer for a bit. He and his sloppy anxiety. So Lily Christine had been arranging *her* trick while he was arranging his ; she had had it all planned out before coming to see him. . . .

" When did you get this ? " he asked at last.

She had left Summerest at about half-past three. Going out, she had given the note to Coghill, making him promise not to give it to his master until late at night. But something about her had scared Coghill, and after thinking about it for nearly a couple of hours he had finally shown it to Summcrest, a few minutes ago.

" I've been ringing her up like mad ever since," Summerest said, " but she is not in. What does it mean, Harvey ? "

" Nothing," Harvey said slowly. He couldn't be bothered with the fellow. He and his fears. It was so difficult to think of anything but Lily Christine. Writing that note. . . .

" God, I've been scared ! " Summerest said. " You mean it's all right ? "

" Yes, quite all right."

" How do you know ? "

Harvey tried to concentrate on Summerest, answer his questions and get rid of him quickly. So the fellow had been afraid. . . .

" That 'good-bye' scared you, I suppose ? " he said slowly, taking the fellow in.

" Yes, it did."

And Summerest, his face stony with anger, swung round and took up the telephone and asked for Lily Christine's number. Harvey could hear, very faintly, Hempel's voice at the other end. No, Lily Christine was not in yet.

Summerest turned to him again, his face stony, closed

up. But the fellow held his anger in, spoke low. He was learning to behave. Amazing how fear made a man sit up and take notice of his fellows' feelings.

" You haven't told me yet what that 'good-bye' means, Harvey? Is she going away? "

" She was thinking of it," Harvey said, unable to concentrate fully on Summerest. So his plotting had been of no earthly use from the very beginning. She had made up her mind as she left the fellow that, as he would not come to some other "arrangement," she would force his hand by taking this step with the one man she knew who was careless of scandal. And when she had come to see him, Harvey, that had been fixed in her mind as the way out, and what he had said to her had done nothing so successfully as to prove to her that he, Harvey, was not the man to trust as a friend. So she had come straight to Ambatriadi, never doubting him—that other incapable. What a dance they'd led her this afternoon—her friends.

" She was thinking," Harvey said, watching the fellow's stony face, " of going away with Ambatriadi to-night."

Summerest's mouth fell open in a comical way.

" No! " he said.

" It was her way of clearing up this mess," Harvey said. " Let me out, you see. Quite a good way, too—if Ambatriadi hadn't been in love with her and a blasted coward at the same time. Or perhaps being in love with her made him a coward. Anyhow . . . he talked sense to her."

Summerest stared toward Ambatriadi. All the tense action had gone from him; there was utter helplessness about the fellow, an immense bewilderment. The "old cart-horse."

Ambatriadi apparently had not heard a word. He was staring out of the window at the strings of lights in the

park. His shoulders were slightly hunched up, oddly. Harvey had never before seen him but as almost unnaturally crect.

"Well, I can't stand this," Summerest said blankly, looking back at Harvey.

"Can't stand what?" Harvey asked cruelly.

"Her being hunted about like this. . . ."

"Yes, that's a good way of putting it," Harvey said, watching him.

There was an extraordinary stuffiness about the fellow's big body when he didn't know what to do next. Like a "sack of flour," exactly.

"I never bargained for this," he said, looking at Harvey as though for help.

"No, I suppose not," Harvey said. "But you can't go . . . trampling on people and have it all your own way, can you?"

Suddenly Ambatriadi spun round, his face working.

"You!" he shouted at Summerest. "Why do you stand there—like a useless drain pipe! Why don't you go and find your wife? She won't have you back, but you can at least beg her pardon."

Summerest stared at him blankly. You could see the fellow was thinking things out, blundering on one thought and then on another.

"Oh, go to hell!" Ambatriadi said wearily, turning away again.

Harvey, with no clear idea in his head, found himself walking down the corridor. Well, all the pother was over now. The fellow would go crawling back to her. He hadn't bargained for all this stress of mind, and now he was being whipped back to her by his wishy-washy tenderness and cowardice. No, he wanted to feel "right" with himself, that was whipping him back. The fellow was no hand at being good or bad. He wasn't anything in

particular, just a daft, selfish man who was always "wanting" something. And now he'd "want" Lily Christine, "want" her so that he could feel "right" with himself. And in the end he would bully her with his misery into taking him back. Yes, she would take him back in the end. Funny how women so different as Mrs. Abbey and Lily Christine would both succumb to the ruthless fascination of male helplessness. The fellow would hang around with his misery, "needing" her, and she would take him back. Then, for him, everything would soon be the same again. He'd feel "right" with himself quite soon. Well, it was a funny world.

He could not find the lift, must have lost his way. But he found a stairway. He wasn't surprised to hear heavy, lumbering steps behind him. The old cart-horse.

"Those lifts make me ill," Summerest said. "Imagine living in America!"

They walked downstairs side by side. Somehow Harvey could not keep anger going against the fellow; it was no good trying. There was something that came out of the confounded man and wrapped itself around you and joined you to him in a messy sort of sympathy. The fellow *needed* human beings much more than most men, that was it. So you gave way to him, gave him what he wanted.

They were outside, in Knightsbridge. The buses were full of people going home from matinées. It was dribbling, you could just see the little strings of dribble grubbing through the lamp-light. Harvey stopped, undecided what to do. Muriel would be home by now.

"Going home?" he asked Summerest.

He found himself walking with the fellow, across confused Knightsbridge into the quiet of Lowndes Street.

"Hope she will be in," Summerest said. "Where do you think she has been since she left Andy?"

"Walking about, perhaps. Plenty to think about."

"I've told her not to time and again," Summerest said angrily, "unless she's got her glasses on."

"You're so sensible yourself," Harvey said, "that I wonder at her not taking your advice."

Well, all the pothecy was over now. The fellow had had his fling, and was crawling back. But what a dance they had led her between them! It showed you what little use men who loved a woman were to her when it came to the point. Hunting her from one perplexity and disappointment to another—and in the end telling her it was all right. The way they'd sent her hurrying from one to the other of them—perplexing her with their queer faultiness and fumbling and cowardice.

Ambatriadi must have been the last straw. No wonder she wasn't home yet. She must have gone for a long fast walk to digest that last disappointment. She had been hunted to him by the absolute necessity of finding a way out for him, Harvey, and his wife. *I can't bear this way of doing things any longer. I think I'm acting for the best.* So she had gone from this daft husband of hers to him, her friend Harvey, and from him to her friend Ambatriadi. "My wife and I can't be entangled in your affairs in this troublesome way." She would have gone to Ambatriadi with those words in her head. But she had banked on her friend Ambatriadi. He wouldn't fail her. She liked him so, trusted him so, and she knew that with his feckless, destructive way of living he would risk less in a scandal than any man she knew. But she hadn't allowed for the rotten fear a man of his age had of a new way of life, of behaving himself in nearness to the woman he loved. His drinking and self-indulgence had become part of him, and he'd be too correct to give way to it in nearness to her—so he had been frightened. But she hadn't allowed for that, never dreamt of it, as she went

striding into his room with those long strides, rather cold and brisk, white-faced, intent, her fur coat swinging after her so bravely, trusting to her old friend.

What a dance they'd led her that afternoon, first one and then the other rubbing into her the futility of trusting to friends, hunting her from one hopelessness to another. What had she thought on leaving Ambatriadi? Friendships tumbling about her head, that was what she must have thought. A nice walk she must have had, among the ruins.

And now, here the fellow was beside him, going home. You could see she loved him—the old cart-horse. But it wasn't any more the love that wanted to touch and cling and be near—it was the far-away, unassassable love of things past which even he couldn't destroy, which nothing could destroy. So she would live with him in the future, loving a memory of him that would be more real to her than his feckless presence. Well, it wasn't such a bad world, after all. There were always consolations for people who didn't push and shove. There were always grand gifts waiting for people who didn't make small points. Yes, it was a beautiful world, really, for people who knew how to cherish love. Lily Christine was lucky, when you came to work it out.

"And what are your plans now?" Harvey asked.

They were nearing the house now. It would have been a little quicker to have crossed Belgrave Square. Still, going across that wide slippery space was no fun. Another corner and they were there.

"Plans? All I want to do at the moment is to tell her it's all right."

Of course, after hunting her from pillar to post. A charming end to a charming day. "It's all right, dear." Then happiness ever after.

"Pity you didn't think of it before, isn't it?" Harvey said.

"I didn't bargain for this. . . ."

Yes, the fellow wanted to feel right with himself now, wanted that even more than he wanted Mrs. Abbey. Suddenly he had found he couldn't bear not being right with himself. . . .

"I'm thinking of going out to the Argentine," Summerest said.

"Chucking the idea of politics?" Harvey put in cruelly.

The fellow ignored that stonily.

"I fancy Lily Christine has had quite enough of me to last her lifetime," he said. "Fellow I know is buying a lot of land out there, and maybe I can be of some use to him. . . ."

But he would come back—if he went at all. He'd have that craving to be right with himself which couldn't be satisfied until he had shown Lily Christine he wasn't such a bad fellow after all. So he'd plague her with his ruthless helplessness until she took him back—and made a fuss of him. An Englishman's home wasn't his castle until a woman had fortified it for him. And then he would begin to take up with pieces of nonsense again to satisfy his sentimental sexuality.

"Hello!" Summerest said.

The door of the house stood wide open. The little narrow hall was alight.

"She must have just come in and forgotten to shut the door," Harvey said. He saw her, striding in, wearing her hopelessness as though it was armour, those flowery blue eyes heedless and far away and cold.

He stood just within the doorway, uncasily undecided, not wanting to go away, not wanting to stay. She would be so relieved to hear that he, Harvey, was out of this mess.

She'd say to the fellow : " Darling, so glad you've seen sense." Then how tired she would be, after the fine dance they had led her between them.

He heard Summerrest's voice upstairs calling out :
" Lily Christine ! Hempel ! *Hempel !*"

He came downstairs again, fixing Harvey with his stony blue stare.

" Odd ! " he said, staring, his hands in his pockets, his big body stirring uneasily. What a sense of helplessness the fellow gave one !

He went to the door beneath the stairs, leading to the basement, and called out Hempel's name. Then he came back to Harvey, fixing him with that stony blue stare that meant he was dished.

" Derelict house," he said. " Damned odd ! "

" Hempel may have gone out for a moment or two," Harvey said.

He went out, stood at the top of the little flight of steps. He felt Summerrest behind him, lounging uneasily. The fellow had a confounded way of communicating his moods, his unease. What the devil was there to be anxious about in Hempel having gone out to post a letter and forgotten to close the door ?

" Well, I'd better be going," Harvey said vaguely. But he felt quite at a loose end with himself, not wanting to go, not wanting to stay.

He stood looking up and down the quiet street. The wet pavements glistened darkly in the lamp-light. There seemed to be quite a lot of movement at the Belgrave Square end, quite a cloud of people standing about.

" What's that, people waiting for Royalty ? " he asked vaguely.

To his astonishment Summerrest shoved him roughly aside and began running toward the crowd. Harvey gaped after him. Then he looked at the crowd again.

Something loomed up from among the little cloud of people. He strained his eyes to make out what. It looked like a lorry.

He couldn't move, stood there gaping, trying to take it in. Summerest had taken it in quickly enough. He was almost there now, running like the dickens. The fellow could move all right. No "cart-horse" about him now.

Harvey suddenly, childishly, vindictively, stamped his foot with anger at Lily Christine. Why the devil did she want to go careering through the streets and across slippery crossings when she was as blind as a bat? Not wearing her spectacles, twirling them about in her hand. And now maybe she had a broken leg for her pains.

He stood there, straining his eyes toward the crowd. He could not move, did not want to. What was the good of getting excited? A bunch of people broke away from the crowd, began to come toward him. He could make out Summerest all right, and a policeman. They were carrying her between them. Anyhow, they were carrying something, and it must be her. Broken her leg, probably. And Hempel, she was there, of course. Very much there, she was. He could hear Hempel crying. It made him furious, her dithering sobs. She'd scream the place down just because Lily Christine had scratched herself. Then there were others, quite a bunch of them. The ghoulish sheep, following a street accident.

He couldn't face them, coming toward him carrying her. What was the good of standing there, waiting for them to come up? He went into the house, into the unused little sitting-room. She'd broken a leg, probably. Suppose it was crushed. The idea of her pain made him feel sick. He gulped, and lit a cigarette. Well, what a day it had been for Lily Christine. She'd remember this day all her life.

The lamp in the street and the light in the hall lit the unused little room. He kept on seeing Lily Christine striding across Belgrave Square, intent, swift, heedless . . . without her spectacles on. Oh, damn ! He sat on the arm of a chair, feeling sick, crumpled up. From where he sat he could see the hall from an angle. He did not want to look, but couldn't help staring at what he could see of the hall, staring, waiting.

When they did pass, he saw scarcely anything. Summerest and a fellow who might be a doctor, blundering past quickly. Well, the hall was narrow enough, and they were carrying her between them. But he didn't see Lily Christine at all. They were carrying something, that was all he saw. She must have broken a leg.

Nobody out there saw him, anyhow, which was a good thing. He would make sure she wasn't badly hurt and then slip away. A broken leg or arm wasn't such a tragedy, after all.

Hempel ran past, sobbing. Drat the woman, why couldn't she be quieter about it ! But a door banged, so maybe she had gone down to the basement. Then there was nothing, nobody, not a sound. Why was Hempel sobbing so ? You couldn't be certain of anything, with that woman. Making all that noise. Sounded like—what was it called ?—keening. He got up uncertainly, but found his legs were trembling idiotically, and sat down again.

He sat there staring at nothing, feeling sick. He simply did not want to know what had happened to her. A useful man in a crisis, that was what he was. He mustn't think of what happened to her. Lily Christine—hurt. He wanted to slip out of the house quietly. After all, what was he doing there, getting in the way ? Then he made out heavy breathing somewhere. He listened intently. The breathing came from out in the hall, but

out of his range. He got up, moved unsteadily to see who it was. Not that he wanted to know anything.

A young man was out in the hall beside the little table with the dusty income-tax envelope on it. He had his back to the wall, as though the wall was important to him. He was staring right at Harvey. He did not seem to take Harvey in, went on staring. He had his cap in his hand, hanging by his knee. A tall well-set-up young man, a good type. His face was dirty white. Done up, he looked.

A policeman stood near him, with his helmet off. A baldish elderly man, quite impassive. In one hand he held not only his helmet but a bowler hat, which looked comic. In the other, an open notebook. The bowler must belong to the doctor.

“Well?” Harvey said to the young man.

He could see the young man’s Adam’s apple moving up and down. He wasn’t the only one who was feeling sick, then.

“Doctor up there?” he asked the policeman.

“Yes, sir. Lucky there was one a few doors away.”

Harvey did not want to ask anything. He simply did not want to.

“Bad business, sir,” the policeman said impersonally.

The young man looked at the policeman quickly, fretfully. Then he looked back at Harvey and opened his mouth quickly, once, twice. There was a nasty gap in his teeth. Harvey had all he could do to fight the sickness rising up in him.

“Slipped right in front of me,” the young man said plaintively. “Never seen such a thing!”

“Couldn’t you stop?” Harvey just managed to ask. Unless he kept his feet planted very firmly on the floor his right knee began trembling idiotically. It was a devil of a strain, keeping his feet firmly planted on the floor.

The young man wet his lips. It was a pity about that gap in his teeth, it spoiled his nice soldierly looks.

"Nearly smashed up lorry trying," he said in a high, hurt voice. "Skidded into a lamp-post."

"That'll do!" said the policeman with a glance up the stairs. Harvey noticed a smear of blood on the back of the policeman's right hand, and looked quickly away.

"I couldn't help it," the young man said confidentially to Harvey. "She seemed to come from nowhere and fall right in front of me. Slipped. I never seen such a thing."

"Went right over the lady," the policeman explained to Harvey. "All four wheels, it looked like."

Harvey did not say anything. The policeman seemed to be examining him.

"I'm just a friend," Harvey said, gulping. "Happened to be here."

"What could I *do*?" the young man said in a high hurt voice.

"That'll do, me lad," the policeman said, quite kindly. "We know all that."

Harvey set his teeth, trying not to think. Lily Christine—smashed up, snuffed out. That was what it came to. He concentrated as hard as he could on the wretched young man. Poor young devil. He looked all out.

"She was very short-sighted," Harvey said to the policeman, blinking. He felt that the policeman was looking at him suspiciously, as though he, Harvey, was up to no good.

Suppose she *had* been wearing her spectacles. . . .

"Yes, the gentleman said that," the policeman said.

"Said what?" Harvey stammered.

Suppose she *had* seen the lorry coming . . . and felt tired, a failure, friendless.

"The gentleman said," the policeman repeated impersonally, "that she was very short-sighted."

"Her husband," Harvey said.

"So I understood, sir," said the policeman. "A nasty shock."

He opened the hand in which he was holding the open notebook and showed Harvey a few bits of muddy glass and what looked like tortoise-shell. Harvey, breathing hard, felt a drop of sweat run down his temple to his cheek.

"The driver couldn't see if she was wearing them or not," the policeman said.

Harvey looked at the young man eagerly.

"Judging from the *position* in which we found them," the policeman said . . .

"She had a way of carrying them in her hand," Harvey said quickly.

"Exactly, sir," the policeman said. "Judging from their position *near* her hand, I should say she was not wearing them."

The young man, his mouth open, looked at Harvey.

"Yes," Harvey said, nodding to him. "Twirling them about in her hand."

The policeman nodded wisely. The young man closed his mouth and looked up at the ceiling.

"Exactly," the policeman said. "A nice-looking young lady doesn't like to show her weak point more'n she can help. It's natural."

"Yes," Harvey said. But he tried as hard as he could to concentrate on the wretched young man.

"You look all out," he said.

The young man did not say anything, but grinned sheepishly, still looking up at the ceiling.

"A drop of something," the policeman suggested, giving Harvey a meaning look.

Harvey looked round the unused little sitting-room, trying to feel capable. There wasn't anything to drink there, anyhow. Where did they keep that whiskey he used to drink? He definitely did not want to go down to the basement, with Hempel sobbing there. He opened the door beneath the stairs, very cautiously. There was not a sound down there, but the lights were on. He went down on tiptoe. In the kitchen, he could hear Hempel sobbing, but it was muffled by a door. She must have her bedroom down there. On the kitchen table were a few dirty plates, a bottle of stout and a tumbler with what looked like dirty soap-suds on the inside of the glass. How filthy servants were when you didn't look after them every minute. He could not see a clean glass anywhere. Still, the dirty soap-suds were the relics of stout. The young man wouldn't be particular. He poured out what remained of the bottle into a glass and took it upstairs.

Summerest was there now, his back blocking the passage. Harvey stopped dead. He couldn't face the fellow. He'd never feel right with himself now, not in this life.

The young man edged, with his back to the wall, past Summerest's bulk toward Harvey and gulped down the stout. Harvey absently took the empty glass from him, listening intently to what the policeman was saying.

"There'll be an inquest, of course," the policeman said. "It'll be a mere matter of form. There's two men outside who saw the lady slip as she was running across his front wheels. I haven't got your name yet, sir, if you please, and the lady's."

Harvey stepped forward quickly, the empty glass still in his hand.

"Here, leave all that to me," he said to Summerest's back, but at the same moment Summerest was asking, very slowly :

"Did they see if she had her spectacles on or not?"

"They couldn't see that, sir," the policeman said. "But judging from their *position* near her hand, the conclusion I have come to is that the young lady could not have been wearing them."

Summerest had already taken the policeman's notebook and was writing his name in it. Harvey took care not to look at the fellow's face. He edged past him into the little sitting-room and sat down again on the arm of the chair. From there all he could see of the fellow was his elbow.

Presently he heard the policeman and the lorry driver going out of the house. He hoped Summerest would forget him and not come in. He tried to will him not to come in. He did not want to see the fellow's face. If only he could slip away quietly.

But when Summerest stood in the doorway, Harvey could not take his eyes from his face. Summerest's hands were in his pockets. He did not show anything in particular, just stood there staring at Harvey as though he was expecting something to happen. Harvey could not find a word to say. There was nothing to say.

"Well," Summerest said slowly. "I've just about torn her into bits, haven't I?"

"We have between us, if it comes to that," Harvey said quickly.

The fellow shifted his stare to the lamp outside the window. He looked exactly as though he was expecting something to happen.

"Of course it was an accident," Harvey said, watching the fellow's stony face. "You heard that about the witnesses—two of them."

"Wonder if she was wearing her spectacles," Summerest said, staring at the lamp outside the window.

"Of course she wasn't!" Harvey said angrily. "You

heard what the policeman said. And she usually didn't. It was an accident, man."

"Yes I know," Summerest said, staring at the lamp outside the window as though he was expecting something to happen. "But still . . ."

Then he turned clumsily in the doorway and disappeared. Harvey heard him lumbering upstairs. The old cart-horse. How sorry she would be for him now.

THE END

